THE MAGAZINE OF Fantasy and Science Fiction

HEINLEIN'S new novel:

Star Lummox

35¢ MAY

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 6, No. 5 MAY

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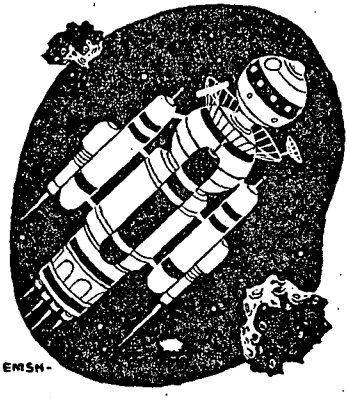
LUMMOX IS HERE TO STAY



(at least for the next two issues) and he raises quite a commotion in the second installment of

ROBERT A. HEINLEIN'S "STAR LUMMOX"

in which the small scale tensions of intergalactic politics culminate in overt violence which threatens the destruction of the lovable star beast . . . and conceivably of Earth itself!

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When George S. Kaufman was asked to write an appreciation of S. J. Perelman, the dramatist who could rewrite a three act play overnight was at a loss for words. He could only say: I appreciate S. J. Perelman. Now, we, who can write an introduction at the drop of a space-helmet, are in Mr. Kaufman's boat. So . . . readers of F&SF, here, at last, is Robert A. Heinlein.

Star Lummox

by ROBERT A. HEINLEIN

(ILLUSTRATIONS BY KIRBERGER)

(First of Three Parts)

I

LUMMOX WAS BORED and hungry. The latter was a normal state; creatures of Lummox's breed were always ready for a little snack, even after a full meal. Being bored was less usual and derived directly from the fact that Lummox's chum and closest associate, John Thomas Stuart, had not been around all day, having chosen to go off somewhere with his friend Betty.

One afternoon was a mere nothing; Lummox could hold his breath that long. But he knew the signs and understood the situation; John Thomas had reached the size and age when he would spend more and more time with Betty, or others like her, and less and less time with Lummox. Then there would come a fairly long period during which John Thomas would spend practically no time with Lummox but at the end of which there would arrive a new John Thomas which would presently grow large enough to make an interesting playmate.

From experience Lummox recognized this cycle as necessary and inevitable; nevertheless the immediate prospect was excruciatingly boring. He lumbered listlessly around the back yard of the Stuart home, looking for anything — a grasshopper, a robin, anything at all that might be worth looking at. He watched a hill of ants for a while. This killed a half hour.

Growing tired of ants, he moved away toward his own house. His own house was just big enough for him to back into it and was the end building

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of a row of decreasing size; the one at the far end would have made a suitable doghouse for a chihuahua.

Piled outside his shed were six bales of hay. Lummox pulled a small amount off one bale and chewed it lazily. There was nothing to stop him from eating the entire pile — except the knowledge that John Thomas would bawl him out bitterly and might even refuse to scratch him with the garden rake for a week or more. The household rules required Lummox not to touch food other than natural forage until it was placed in his manger; Lummox usually obeyed as he hated dissension and was humiliated by disapproval.

Besides, he did not want hay. He had had hay for supper last night, he would have it again tonight, and again tomorrow night. Lummox wanted something with more body and a more interesting flavor. He ambled over to the low fence which separated the several acres of back yard from Mrs. Stuart's formal garden, stuck his head over and looked longingly at Mrs. Stuart's roses. The fence was merely a symbol marking the line he must not cross. Lummox had crossed it once, a few years earlier, and had sampled the rose bushes — just a sample, a mere appetizer, but Mrs. Stuart had made such a fuss that he hated to think about it even now.

But he recalled some rose bushes that did not belong to Mrs. Stuart, and therefore, in Lummox's opinion, did not belong to anybody. They were in the garden of the Donahues, next door west. There was a possible way, Lummox had been thinking about, to reach these "ownerless" bushes.

The Stuart place was surrounded by a ten-foot concrete wall. Lummox had never tried to climb over it, although he had nibbled the top of it in places. In the rear there was one break in it, where the gully draining the land crossed the property line. The gap in the wall was filled by a massive grating of eight-by-eight timbers, bolted together with extremely heavy bolts. The vertical timbers were set in the stream bed and the contractor who had erected it had assured Mrs. Stuart that it would stop Lummox, or a herd of elephants.

Lummox knew that the contractor was mistaken, but his opinion had not been asked and he had not offered it. John Thomas had not expressed an opinion either, but he had seemed to suspect the truth; he had emphatically ordered Lummox not to tear the grating down.

But Lummox felt no responsibility for natural forces. He had noticed, about three months back, that spring rains had eroded the gully so that two of the vertical timbers were no longer imbedded but were merely resting on the dry stream bed. Lummox had been thinking about this for several weeks and had found that a gentle nudge tended to spread the timbers at the bottom. A slightly heavier nudge might open up a space wide enough

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without actually tearing down the grating —

Lummox lumbered down to check up. Still more of the stream bed had washed away in the last rain; one of the vertical timbers hung a few inches free of the sand. The one next to it was barely resting on the ground. Lummox smiled like a simple-minded golliwog and carefully, delicately insinuated his head between the two big posts. He pushed gently.

Above his head came a sound of rending wood and the pressure was suddenly relieved. Startled, Lummox pulled his head out and looked up. The upper end of one eight-by-eight had torn free of its bolts; it pivoted now on a lower horizontal girder. Lummox clucked to himself. Too bad — but it couldn't be helped. No doubt John Thomas would be vexed — but in the meantime here was an opening through the grating. He lowered his head like a football lineman, set himself in low gear, and pushed on through. There followed several sounds of protesting and rending wood and sharper ones of broken bolts, but Lummox ignored it all; he was on the far side now, a free agent.

He paused and reared up like a caterpillar, lifting legs one and three, two and four,

"Bad *Lummie! Bad, bad Lummie* —"

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off the ground, and looked around. It was certainly nice to be outside; he wondered why he had not done it sooner. It had been a long time since John Thomas had taken him out, even for a short walk and moreover there were still those ownerless rose bushes. . . .

He ambled away parallel to the Stuart's rear wall, then swung around the end onto the Donahue land.

John Thomas Stuart XI got home shortly before dinner time, having already dropped Betty Sorenson at her home. He noticed, as he landed, that Lummox was not in sight, but he assumed that his pet was in his shed. His mind was not on Lummox, but on the age-old fact that females do not operate by logic, at least as logic is understood by males.

He was planning to enter Western Tech; Betty wanted them both to attend the state university. He had pointed out that he could not get the courses he wanted at state U.; Betty had insisted that he could and had looked up references to prove her point. He had rebutted by saying that it was not the name of a course that mattered, but who taught it. The discussion had fallen to pieces when she had refused to concede that he was an authority.

He had absent-mindedly unstrapped his harness copter, while dwelling on the illogic of the feminine mind, and was racking it in the hallway, when his mother burst into his presence. "John Thomas! *Where* have you been?"

He tried to think what he could have slipped on now. It was a bad sign when she called him "John Thomas" — "John" or "Johnnie" was okay, or even "Johnnie Boy." But "John Thomas" usually meant that he had been accused, tried, and convicted in absentia. "Huh? Why, I told you at lunch, Mum. Out hopping with Betty. We flew over to —"

"Never mind that! Do you know what *that beast* has done?"

Now he had it. Lummox. He hoped it wasn't Mum's garden. Maybe Lum had just knocked over his own house again. If so, Mum would level off presently. Maybe he had better build a new one, bigger. "What's the trouble?" he asked cautiously.

" 'What's the trouble?' What isn't the trouble? John Thomas, this time you simply will have to get rid of it. This is the last straw."

"Take it easy, Mum," he said hastily. "We can't get rid of Lum. You promised Dad."

She made no direct answer. "With the police calling every ten minutes and that great dangerous beast rampaging around and —"

"*Huh?* Wait a minute, Mum, Lum isn't dangerous; he's gentle as a kitten. What happened?"

"Everything!"

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He gradually drew out of her some of the details. Lummox had gone for a stroll; that much was clear. John Thomas hoped without conviction that Lummox had not got at any iron or steel while he was out; iron had such an explosive effect on his metabolism. There was the time Lummox had eaten that second-hand Buick —

His thoughts were interrupted by his mother's words. "— and Mrs. Donahue is simply furious! And well she might be — her prize roses."

Oh oh, that was bad. He tried to recall the exact amount in his savings account. He would have to apologize, too, and think of ways to butter up the old biddy. In the meantime he would beat Lummox's ears with an ax; Lummox knew about roses, there was no excuse.

"Look, Mum, I'm awfully sorry. I'll go right out and pound some sense into his thick head. When I get through with him, he won't dare sneeze without permission." John Thomas started edging around her.

"Where are you going?" she demanded.

"Huh? Out to talk with Lum, of course. When I get through with him —"

"Don't be silly. He isn't here."

"Huh? Where is he?" John Thomas swiftly rearranged his prayers to hope that Lummox hadn't found very much iron. The Buick hadn't really been Lummox's fault and anyhow it had belonged to John Thomas, but —

"No telling where he is now. Chief Dreiser said —"

"The *police* are after Lummox?"

"You can just bet they are, young man! The entire safety patrol is after him. Mr. Dreiser wanted me to come downtown and take him home, but I told him we would have to get you to handle that beast."

"But Mother, Lummox would have obeyed you. He always does. Why did Mr. Dreiser take him downtown? The poor baby is timid; he wouldn't like —"

"Poor baby indeed! He wasn't taken downtown."

"But you said he was."

"I said no such thing. If you'll be quiet, I'll tell you what happened."

It appeared that Mrs. Donahue had surprised Lummox when he had eaten only four or five of her rose bushes. With much courage and little sense she had run at him with a broom. Lummox was upset; he had a sense of propriety as nice as that of any house cat. People were not food; in fact, people were almost invariably friendly.

So his feelings were hurt. He had lumbered away from there, pouting.

The next action report on Lummox was from a point two miles away and about 30 minutes later. The Stuarts lived in a suburban area of Westville; open country separated it from the main part of town. Mr. Ito had a

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small farm in this interval, where he hand-raised vegetables for the tables of gourmets. Mr. Ito apparently had not known what it was that he had found pulling up his cabbages and gulping them down. Lummox's long residence in the vicinity was certainly no secret, but Mr. Ito had no interest in other people's business and had never seen Lummox before.

But he showed no more hesitation than had Mrs. Donahue. He dashed into his house and came out with a gun that had been handed down to him from his grandfather — a relic of the Fourth World War of the sort known affectionately as a "tank killer."

Mr. Ito steadied the gun on a potting bench and let Lummox have it where he would have sat down had Lummox been so constructed. The noise scared Mr. Ito (he had never heard the weapon fired) and the flash momentarily blinded him. When he blinked his eyes and recovered, the thing had gone.

But it was easy to tell the direction in which it had gone. This encounter had not humiliated Lummox as had the brush with Mrs. Donahue; this frightened him almost out of his wits. While busy with his fresh green salad he had been faced toward a triplet of Mr. Ito's greenhouses. When the explosion tickled him and the blast assailed his hearing, Lummox shifted into high gear and got underway in the direction he was heading. Ordinarily he used a leg firing order of 1, 4, 5, 8, 2, 3, 6, 7 and repeat, good for speeds from a slow crawl to fast as a trotting horse; he now broke from a standing start into a double-ended gallop, moving legs 1 & 2 & 5 & 6 together, alternated with 3 & 4 & 7 & 8.

Lummox was through the three greenhouses before he had time to notice them, leaving a tunnel suitable for a medium truck. Straight ahead, three miles away, lay downtown Westville.

John Thomas Stuart listened to his mother's confused account with growing apprehension. When he heard about Mr. Ito's greenhouses, he stopped thinking about his savings account and started wondering what assets he could convert into cash. His jump harness was almost new — but shucks! it wouldn't pay the damage. He wondered if there was any kind of a dicker he could work with the bank? One sure thing: Mum wouldn't help him out, not the state she was in.

Later reports were spotty. Lummox seemed to have gone across country until he hit the highway leading into town. A transcontinental trucker had complained to a traffic officer, over a cup of coffee, that he had just seen a robot pedatruck with no license plates and that the durned thing had been paying no attention to traffic lanes. But the trucker had used it as an excuse to launch a diatribe about the danger of robot drivers and how there was no substitute for a human driver, sitting in the cab and keeping his eyes

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open for emergencies. The traffic patrolman had not seen Lummox, being already at his coffee when Lummox passed, and had not been impressed since the trucker was obviously prejudiced. Nevertheless he had phoned in.

Traffic control center in Westville paid no attention to the report; control was fully occupied with a reign of terror.

John Thomas interrupted his mother. "Has anybody been hurt?"

"Hurt? I don't know. Probably. John Thomas, you've got to get rid of that beast at once."

He ignored that statement; it seemed the wrong time to argue it. "What else happened?"

Mrs. Stuart did not know in detail. Near the middle of town Lummox came down a local chute from the overhead freeway. He was moving slowly now and with hesitation; traffic and large numbers of people confused him. He stepped off the street onto a sidewalk. The walk ground to a stop, not being designed for six tons of concentrated load; fuses had blown, circuit breakers had opened, and pedestrian traffic at the busiest time of day was thrown into confusion for twenty blocks of the shopping district.

Women had screamed, children and dogs had added to the excitement, safety officers had tried to restore order, and poor Lummox made a perfectly natural mistake — the big display windows of the Bon Marché looked like a refuge. The duraglass of the windows was supposed to be unbreakable, but the architect had not counted on Lummox's mistaking it for empty air. Lummox went in and tried to hide in a model bedroom display. He was not very successful.

John Thomas's next question was cut short by a thump on the roof; someone had landed. He looked up. "You expecting anyone, Mum?"

"It's probably the police. They said they would —"

"The police? Oh, my!"

"Don't go away — you've got to see them."

"I wasn't going anywhere," he answered miserably and punched a button to unlock the roof entrance.

Moments later the lazy lift from the roof creaked to a stop and the door opened; a safety sergeant and a patrolman stepped out. "Mrs. Stuart?" the sergeant began formally. "In your service, ma'am. We —" He caught sight of John Thomas, who was trying not to be noticed. "Are you John T. Stuart?"

John gulped. "Yessir."

"Then come along. 'Scuse us, ma'am. Or do you want to come too?"

"Me? Oh, no, I'd just be in the way."

The sergeant nodded relieved agreement. "Yes, ma'am. Come along, youngster. Minutes count." He took John by the arm.

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John tried to shrug away. "Hey, what is this? You got a warrant or something?"

The police officer stopped, seemed to count ten, then said slowly, "Son, I do not have a warrant. But if you are the John T. Stuart I'm looking for — and I know you are — then unless you want something drastic and final to happen to that deep-space what-is-it you've been harboring, you'd better snap to and come with us."

John Thomas Stuart kept quiet and went with him.

In the three minutes it took the patrol car to fly downtown John Thomas tried to find out the worst. "Uh, Mister Patrol Officer? There hasn't been anybody hurt? Has there?"

"Sergeant Mendoza," the sergeant answered. "I hope not. I don't know."

John considered this bleak answer. "Well . . . Lummox is still in the Bon Marché?"

"Is that what you call it — Lummox? It doesn't seem strong enough. No, we got it out of there. It's under the West Arroyo viaduct — I hope."

The answer sounded ominous. "What do you mean: 'you hope'?"

"Well, first we blocked off Main and Hamilton, then we chivvied it out of the store with fire extinguishers. Nothing else seemed to bother it; solid slugs just bounced off. Say, what's that beast's hide made of? Ten-point steel?"

"Uh, not exactly." Sergeant Mendoza's satire was closer to fact than John Thomas cared to discuss; he still was wondering if Lummox had eaten any iron. After the mishap of the digested Buick Lummox's growth had taken an enormous spurt; in two weeks he had jumped from the size of a misshapen hippopotamus to his present unlikely dimensions, more growth than he had shown in the preceding generation of Stuarts. It had made him extremely gaunt, like a canvas tarpaulin draped over a scaffolding, his quite unEarthly skeleton pushing through his skin; it had taken three years of a high-caloric diet to make him chubby again. Since that time John Thomas had tried to keep metal away from Lummox, most especially iron, even though his father and his grandfather had always fed him tidbits of scrap metal.

"Um. Anyhow the fire extinguishers dug him out — only he sneezed and knocked two men down. After that we used more fire extinguishers to turn him down Hamilton, meaning to herd him into open country where he couldn't do so much damage — seeing as how we couldn't find you. We were making out pretty well when we came to where we meant to turn him off on Hillcrest and head him back to your place. But he got away from us and headed out onto the viaduct, ran into the guard rail and went off, and — well, you'll see, right now. Here we are."

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Half a dozen police cars were hovering over the end of the viaduct. Surrounding the area were many private air cars and an air bus or two; the patrol cars were keeping them back from the scene. There were several hundred harness flyers as well, darting like bats in and out among the vehicles and making the police problem more difficult. On the ground a few regular police, supplemented by emergency safety officers wearing arm bands, were trying to hold the crowd back and divert traffic. Sergeant Mendoza's driver threaded his way through the cars in the air, while speaking into a hushophone on his chest. Chief Dreiser's bright red command car detached itself from the knot over the end of the viaduct and approached them.

Both cars stopped, a few yards apart and a hundred feet above the viaduct. John Thomas could see the big gap in the railing where Lummox had gone over, but could not see Lummox himself; the viaduct blocked his view. The door of the command car opened and Chief Dreiser leaned out; he looked harassed and his bald head was covered with sweat. "Tell the Stuart boy to stick his head out."

John Thomas ran a window down and did so. "Here, sir."

"Lad, can you control that monster?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I hope you're right. Mendoza! Land him. Let him try it."

"Yes, Chief." Mendoza spoke to the driver, who moved the car past the viaduct and started letting down beyond it. Lummox could be seen then; he had taken refuge under the end of the bridge, making himself small — for him. John Thomas leaned out.

"Lum! Lummie boy! Come to papa."

The creature stirred and the end of the viaduct stirred with him. About twelve feet of his front end emerged from under the structure and he looked around wildly.

"Here, Lum! Up here!"

Lummox caught sight of his friend and split his head in an idiot grin. Sergeant Mendoza snapped, "Put her down, Slats. Let's get this over."

The driver lowered a bit, then said anxiously, "That's enough, Sergeant. I saw that critter rear up earlier."

"All right, all right." Mendoza opened the door and kicked out a rope ladder used in rescue work. "Can you go down that, son?"

"Sure." With Mendoza to give him a hand John Thomas shinnied out the door and got a grip on the ladder. He felt his way down and came to the point where there was no more ladder; he was still six feet above Lummox's head. He looked down. "Heads up, baby. Take me down."

Lummox lifted another pair of legs from the ground and carefully placed

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his broad skull under John Thomas, who stepped onto it, staggering a little and grabbing for a hand hold. Lummox lowered him gently to the ground.

John Thomas jumped off and turned to face him. Well, the fall apparently had not hurt Lum any; that was a relief. He would get him home first and then go over him inch by inch.

In the meantime Lummox was nuzzling his legs and making a sound remarkably like a purr. John looked stern. "*Bad* Lummie! Bad, bad Lummie — you're a mess, aren't you?"

Lummox looked embarrassed. He lowered his head to the ground, looked up at his friend, and opened his mouth wide. "I didn't *mean* to," he protested in his baby-girl voice.

"You didn't mean to. You didn't *mean* to! Oh, no, you never do. I'm going to take your front feet and stuff them down your throat. I'm going to beat you to a pulp and then use you for a rug. No supper for you. You didn't mean to, indeed!"

The bright red car came close and hovered. "Okay?" demanded Chief Dreiser.

"Sure."

"All right. Here's the plan. I'm going to move that barrier up ahead. You get him back up on Hillcrest, going out the upper end of the draw. There will be an escort waiting; you fall in behind and stay with it all the way home. Get me?"

"Okay." John Thomas saw that in both directions the arroyo road had been blocked with riot shields, tractors with heavy armor mounted on their fronts, so that a temporary barrier could be thrown across a street or square. Such equipment was standard for any city safety force since the Riots of '91, but he could not recall that Westville had ever used them; he began to realize that the day that Lummox went to town would not soon be forgotten.

But he was happy that Lummox had been too timid to munch on those steel shields. He was beginning to hope that his pet had been too busy all afternoon to eat any ferrous metal. He turned back to him. "All right, get your ugly carcass out of that hole. We're going home."

Lummox complied eagerly; the viaduct again trembled as he brushed against it. "Make me a saddle."

Lummox's midsection slumped down a couple of feet. He thought about it very hard and his upper surface shaped itself into contours resembling a chair. "Hold still," John Thomas ordered. "I don't want any mashed fingers." Lummox did so, quivering a little, and the young man scrambled up, grabbing at slip folds in Lummox's durable hide. He sat himself like a rajah ready for a tiger hunt.

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"All right. Slow march now, up the road. No, no! Gee around, you numbskull. Uphill, not down."

Docilely, Lummox turned and ambled away.

Two patrol ground cars led the way; two others brought up the rear. Chief Dreiser's tomato-red runabout hung over them at a safe distance. John Thomas lounged back and spent the time composing, first, what he was going to say to Lummox, and second, what he was going to say to his mother. The first speech was much easier; he kept going back and embellishing it with fresh adjectives whenever he found himself running into snags on the second.

They were half way home when a single flier, hopping free in a copter harness, approached the little parade. The flier ignored the red warning light stabbing out from the police chief's car and slanted straight down at the huge star beast. John Thomas recognized Betty's slapdash style even before he could make out features. He caught her as she cut power.

Chief Dreiser slammed a window open and stuck his head out. He was in full flow when Betty interrupted him. "Why, Chief Dreiser! What a terrible way to talk!"

He stopped and took another look. "Is that Betty Sorenson?"

"Of course it is. And I must say, Chief, that after all the years you've taught Sunday School I never thought I would live to hear you use such —"

"Young lady, hold your tongue."

"Me? But you were the one who was using —"

"Quiet! I've had all I can take today. You get that suit to buzzing and hop out of here. This is official business. Now get out."

She glanced at John Thomas and winked, then set her face in cherubic innocence. "But, Chief, I can't."

"Huh? Why not?"

"I'm out of juice. This was an emergency landing."

"Betty, you quit fibbing to me."

"Me? Fibbing? Why, Deacon Dreiser!"

"I'll deacon you. If your tanks are dry, get down off that beast and walk home. He's dangerous."

"Lummie dangerous? Lummie wouldn't hurt a fly. And besides, do you want me to walk home alone? On a country road? When it's almost dark? I'm surprised at you."

Dreiser sputtered and closed the window. Betty wiggled out of her harness and settled back in the wider seat that Lummox had provided without being told. John Thomas looked at her. "Hi, Slugger."

"Hi, Knothead."

"I didn't know you knew the Chief."

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"I know everybody. Now shut up. I've gotten here, with all speed and much inconvenience, as soon as I heard the newscast. You and Lummox between you could not manage to think your way out of this, even with Lummox doing most of the work — so I rallied around. Now give me the grisly details. This will probably be our only chance for a private word before they start worrying you, so you had better talk fast."

"Huh? What do you think you are? A lawyer?"

"I'm better than a lawyer, my mind is not cluttered with stale precedents. I can be creative about it."

"Well . . ." Actually he felt better now that Betty was present. It was no longer just Lummox and himself against an unfriendly world. He poured out the story while she listened soberly.

"Anybody hurt?" she asked at last.

"I don't think so. At least they didn't mention it."

"They would have." She sat up straight. "Then we've got nothing to worry about."

"What? With hundreds, maybe thousands, in damage? I'd like to know what you call trouble!"

"People getting hurt," she answered. "Anything else can be managed. Maybe we'll have Lummox go through bankruptcy."

"Huh? That's silly!"

"If you think that is silly, you've never been in a law court."

"Have you?"

"Don't change the subject. After all, Lummox was attacked with a deadly weapon."

"It didn't hurt him; it just singed him a little."

"Beside the point. It undoubtedly caused him great mental anguish. I'm not sure he was responsible for anything that happened afterwards. Be quiet and let me think."

"Do you mind if I think, too?"

"Not as long as I don't hear the gears grind. Pipe down."

The parade continued to the Stuart home in silence. Betty gave him one piece of advice as they stopped. "Admit nothing. *Nothing.* And don't sign anything. Holler if you need me."

Mrs. Stuart did not come out to meet them. Chief Dreiser inspected the gap in the grating with John Thomas, with Lummox hanging over their shoulders. The Chief watched in silence as John Thomas took a string and tied it across the opening.

"There! Now he can't get out again."

Dreiser pulled at his lip. "Son, are you all right in the head?"

"You don't understand, sir. Lummox!"

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"Yes, Johnnie?"

"See that string?"

"Yes, Johnnie."

"You bust that string and I'll bust your silly head. Understand me?"

"Yes, Johnnie."

"Promise? Cross your heart?"

"Cross my heart."

"He hasn't really got a heart," Johnnie went on. "He has an uncentralized circulatory system. It's like —"

"I don't care if he has rotary pumps, as long as he stays home."

"He will. He's never broken 'Cross my heart,' even if he hasn't got one."

Dreiser chewed his thumb. "All right. I'll leave a man out here with a portophone tonight. And tomorrow we'll put some steel I-beams in there in place of that wood."

"He won't get out."

"He had better not. You realize that you are both under arrest, don't you? But I've got no way to lock that monstrosity up."

John Thomas did not answer. Dreiser went on in a kindly voice, "Try not to worry about it. You seem like a good boy and everybody thought well of your father. Now I've got to go in and have a word with your mother. You had better stay here until my man arrives — and then maybe sort of introduce him to, uh, this thing." He passed a doubtful eye over Lummox.

John Thomas stayed while the police chief went back to the house. Now was the time to give Lummox what-for, but he did not have the heart for it. Not just then.

II

To John Thomas Stuart XI the troubles of himself and Lummox seemed unique and unbearable, yet he was not alone, even around Westville. Little Mr. Ito was suffering from an always fatal disease . . . old age. It would kill him soon. Behind uncounted closed doors in Westville other persons suffered silently the countless forms of quiet desperation which can close in on a man, or woman, for reasons of money, family, health, or face.

Farther away, in the state capital, the Governor stared hopelessly at a stack of papers — evidence that would certainly send to prison his oldest and most trusted friend. Much farther away, on Mars, a prospector abandoned his wrecked sandmobile and got ready to attempt the long trek back to Outpost. He would never make it.

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Incredibly farther away, 27 light-years, the Starship *Bolivar* was entering an interspatial transition. A flaw in a tiny relay would cause that relay to operate a tenth of a second later than it should. The *S.S. Bolivar* would wander between the stars for many years — but she would never find her way home.

Inconceivably farther from Earth, halfway across the local star cloud, a race of arboreal crustaceans was slowly losing to a younger, more aggressive race of amphibians. It would be several thousands of Earth years before the crustaceans were extinct, but the issue was not in doubt. This was regrettable (by human standards) for the crustacean race had mental and spiritual abilities which complemented human traits in a fashion which could have permitted a wealth of civilized cooperation with them. But when the first Earth-humans landed there, some eleven thousand years in the future, the crustaceans would be long dead.

Back on Earth at Federation Capital, His Excellency the Right Honorable Henry Gladstone Kiku, M.A. (Oxon.), Litt.D. *honoris causa* (Capetown), O.B.E., Permanent Under Secretary for Spatial Affairs, was not worried about the doomed crustaceans because he would never know of them. He was not yet worried about *S.S. Bolivar* but he would be. Aside from the ship, the loss of one passenger in that ship would cause a chain reaction of headaches for Mr. Kiku and all his associates for years to come.

Anything and everything outside Earth's ionosphere was Mr. Kiku's responsibility and worry. Anything which concerned the relationships between Earth and any part of the explored universe was also his responsibility. Even affairs which were superficially strictly Earthside were also his concern, if they affected or were in any way affected by anything which was extra-terrestrial, interplanetary, or interstellar in nature . . . a very wide range indeed.

His problems included such things as the importation of Martian sand grass, suitably mutated, for the Tibetan plateau. Mr. Kiku's office had not approved that until after a careful mathematical examination of the possible effect on the Australian sheep industry — and a dozen other factors. Such things were done cautiously, with the gruesome example of Madagascar and the Martian berryroot always before them. Economic decisions did not upset Mr. Kiku, no matter how many toes he stepped on; other sorts kept him awake nights — such as his decision not to give police escorts to Goddard exchange students from Procyon VII despite the very real danger to them from provincial Earthmen with prejudices against beings with unEarthly arrangements of limbs or eyes or such; the cephalopods of that planet were a touchy people and something very like a police escort was their own usual punishment for criminals.

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Mr. Kiku had an extremely large staff to help him, of course, and, also of course, the help of the Secretary himself. The Secretary made speeches, greeted Very Important Visitors, gave out interviews, and in many other ways eased for Mr. Kiku an otherwise unbearable load — Mr. Kiku would be first to admit this. As long as the current Secretary behaved himself, minded his business, took care of public appearances, and let the Under Secretary get on with the department's work, he had Mr. Kiku's approval. Of course, if he failed to pull his load or threw his weight around, Mr. Kiku was capable of finding ways to get rid of him. But it had been fifteen years since he had found it necessary to be so drastic; even the rawest political appointee could usually be broken to harness.

Mr. Kiku had not made up his mind about the current Secretary, but was not now thinking about him. Instead he was looking over the top-sheet synopsis for Project Cerberus, a power proposal for the research station on Pluto. A reminder light on his desk flashed and he looked up to see the door dilate between his office and that of the Secretary. The Secretary walked in, whistling "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"; Mr. Kiku did not recognize the tune.

He broke off. "Greetings, Henry. No, don't get up."

Mr. Kiku had not started to get up. "How do you do, Mr. Secretary? What can I do for you?"

"Nothing much, nothing much." He paused by Mr. Kiku's desk and picked up the project folder. "What are you swotting now? Cerberus, eh? Henry, that's an engineering matter. Why should we worry about it?"

"There are aspects," Mr. Kiku answered carefully, "that concern us."

"I suppose so. Budget and so forth." His eye sought the bold-faced line reading: ESTIMATED COST: 3.5 megabucks and 7.4 lives. "What's this? I can't go before the Council and ask them to approve this. It's fantastic."

"The first estimate," Mr. Kiku said evenly, "was over eight megabucks and more than a hundred lives."

"I don't mind the money, but this other — You are in effect asking the Council to sign death warrants for seven and four-tenths men. You can't do that, it isn't human. Say, what the deuce is four-tenths of a man anyway? How can you kill a fraction of a man?"

"Mr. Secretary," his subordinate answered patiently, "any project bigger than a schoolyard swing involves probable loss of life. But that hazard factor is low; it means that working on Project Cerberus will be safer, on the average, than staying Earthside. That's my rule of thumb."

"Eh?" The Secretary looked again at the synopsis. "Then why not say so? Put the thing in the best light and so forth?"

"This report is for my — for our eyes, only. The report to the Council

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will emphasize safety precautions and will not include an estimate of deaths . . . which, after all, is a guess."

"Mmm, 'a guess.' Yes, of course." The Secretary put the report down, seemed to lose interest.

"Anything else, sir?"

"Oh, yes! Henry old man, you know that Rargyllian dignitary I am supposed to receive today? Dr. What's-his-name?"

"Dr. Ftaeml." Mr. Kiku glanced at his desk control panel. "Your appointment is, uh, an hour and seven minutes from now."

"That's just it. I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to substitute. Apologies to him and so forth. Tell him I'm tied up with affairs of state."

"Sir? I wouldn't advise that. He will expect to be received by an official of your rank — and the Rargyllians are extremely meticulous about protocol."

"Oh, come now, this native won't know the difference."

"But he will, sir."

"Well, let him think that you're me — I don't care. But I won't be here and that's that. The Secretary General has invited me to go to the ball game with him — and an invitation from the S. G. is a 'must', y'know."

Mr. Kiku knew that it was nothing of the sort, had the commitment been explained. But he shut up. "Very well, sir."

"Thanks, old chap." The Secretary left, again whistling.

When the door closed, Mr. Kiku with an angry gesture slapped a row of switches on the desk panel. He was locked in now and could not be reached by phone, video, tube, autowriter, or any other means, save by an alarm button which his own secretary had used only once in twelve years. He leaned elbows on his desk, covered his head with his hands and rubbed his fingers through his woolly pate.

This trouble, that trouble, the other trouble — and always some moron to jiggle his elbow! Why had he ever left Africa? Where came this itch for public service? An itch that had long since turned into mere habit —

He sat up and opened his middle drawer. It was bulging with real estate prospectuses from Kenya; he took out a handful and soon was comparing relative merits of farms. Now here was a little honey, if a man had the price — better than eight hundred acres, half of it in cultivation, and seven proved wells on the property. He looked at map and photographs and presently felt better. After a while he put them away and closed the drawer.

He was forced to admit that, while what he had told the chief was true, his own nervous reaction came mostly from his life-long fear of snakes. If Dr. Ftaeml were anything but a Rargyllian . . . or if the Rargyllians had not been medusa humanoids, he wouldn't have minded. Of course,

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he knew that those tentacles growing out of a Rargyllian's head were *not* snakes — but his stomach didn't know it. He would have to find time for a hypnotic treatment before — no, there wasn't time; he'd have to take a pill instead.

Sighing, he flipped the switches back on. His incoming basket started to fill up at once and all the communication instruments showed lights. But the lights were amber rather than blinking red; he ignored them and glanced through the stuff falling into his basket. Most of the items were for his information only; under doctrine his subordinates or their subordinates had taken action. Occasionally he would check a name and a suggested action and drop the sheet in the gaping mouth of the outgoing basket.

A radiotype came in that was not routine, in that it concerned a creature alleged to be extra-terrestrial but unclassified as to type and origin. The incident involved seemed unimportant — some nonsense in one of the native villages in the western part of the continent. But the factor of an extra-terrestrial creature automatically required the local police to report it to Spatial Affairs, and the lack of classification of the e.-t. prevented action under doctrine and resulted in the report being kicked upstairs.

Mr. Kiku had never seen Lummox and would have had no special interest if he had. But Mr. Kiku knew that each contact with "Out There" was unique. The universe was limitless in its variety. To assume without knowledge, to reason by analogy, to take the unknown for granted, all meant to invite disaster.

Mr. Kiku looked over his list to see whom he could send. Any of his career officers could act as a court of original and superior jurisdiction in any case involving extra-terrestrials, but who was on Earth and free?

Sergei Greenberg, that was the man. System Trade Intelligence could get along without a chief for a day or two. He flipped a switch. "Sergei?"

"Yes, boss?"

"Busy?"

"Well, yes and no. I'm paring my nails and trying to figure a reason why the taxpayers should pay me more money."

"Should they, now? I'm sending a bluesheet down." Mr. Kiku checked Greenberg's name on the radiotype, dropped it in his outgoing basket, waited a few seconds until he saw Greenberg pick it out of his own incoming basket. "Read it."

Greenberg did so, then looked up. "Well, boss?"

"Phone the local justice that we are assuming tentative jurisdiction, then buzz out and look into it."

"Thy wish is my command, O King. Even money the critter is terrestrial after all, two to one I can identify if it isn't."

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"No wager, not at those odds. You're probably right. But it might be a 'special situation'; we can't take chances."

Greenberg glanced at the sheet. "Hey! What do you know? It's in the mountains — this may take two or three weeks, boss. Hot enough for you?"

"Take more than three days and I'll charge it off your annual leave." Mr. Kiku switched off and turned to other matters. He disposed of a dozen calls, found the bottom of his incoming basket and lost it again, then noticed that it was time for the Rargyllian. Goose flesh crawled over him and he dug hastily into his desk for one of the special pills his doctor had warned him not to take too frequently. He had just gulped it when his secretary's light started blinking.

"Sir? Dr. Ftaeml is here."

"Show him in." Mr. Kiku muttered in a language his ancestors had used in making magic — against snakes, for example. As the door dilated he hung on his face the expression suitable for receiving distinguished visitors.

III

The intervention by the Department of Spatial Affairs in the case of Lummox did not postpone the hearing; it speeded it up. Mr. Greenberg phoned the district judge, asked for the use of his court room, and requested him to have all parties and witnesses in court at 10 o'clock the next morning — including, of course, the extra-terrestrial that was the center of the fuss. Judge O'Farrell questioned the last point.

"This creature — you need him, too?"

Greenberg said that he most decidedly wanted the e.-t. present, since his connection with the case was the reason for intervention. "Judge, we people in DepSpace don't like to butt into your local affairs. After I've had a look at the creature and have asked half a dozen questions, I can probably bow out — which will suit us both. So have the beastie present, will you?"

"Eh, he's rather too large to bring into the court room. We'll have to rig a temporary pen on the lawn outside the courthouse."

"Swell! See you tomorrow, Judge. Thanks for everything."

Chief Dreiser decided to move Lummox before daylight, as he wished to get him penned up before the streets were crowded. But nobody had thought to notify John Thomas. He was awakened at 4 in the morning with a sickening shock; the wakening had interrupted a nightmare, he believed at first that something dreadful had happened to Lummox.

Once the situation was clear he was non-cooperative; he was a "slow

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starter," one of those individuals with a low morning blood-sugar count who is worth nothing until after a hearty breakfast — which he now insisted on.

Chief Dreiser looked angry. Mrs. Stuart looked mother-knows-best and said, "Now, dear, don't you think you had better —".

"I'm going to have my breakfast. And Lummox, too."

Dreiser said, "Young man, you don't have the right attitude. You can get breakfast downtown."

John Thomas looked stubborn. His mother said sharply, "John Thomas! I won't have it, do you hear? You're being difficult, just like your father was."

The reference to his father rubbed him even more the wrong way. He said bitterly, "Why don't you stand up for me, Mum? They taught me in school that a citizen can't be snatched out of his home any time a policeman gets a notion. But you seem anxious to help *him* instead of *me*. Whose side are you on?"

She stared at him, astounded, as he had a long record of docile obedience. "John Thomas! You can't speak to your mother that way!"

"Yes," agreed Dreiser. "Be polite to your mother, or I'll give you the back of my hand — unofficially, of course." He unbuttoned his tunic, pulled out a folded paper. "Sergeant Mendoza told me about the quibble you pulled the other day — so I came prepared. There's my warrant. Now, will you come? Or will I drag you?"

He stood there, slapping the paper against his palm, but did not offer it to John Thomas. But when John Thomas reached for it, he let him have it and waited while he read it. At last Dreiser said, "Well? Are you satisfied?"

"This is a court order," John Thomas said slowly, "telling me to appear and requiring me to bring Lummox."

"It certainly is."

"But it says 10 o'clock. It doesn't say I can't eat breakfast first . . . as long as I'm there by 10."

The chief took a deep breath, expanding visibly. His face, already pink, got red, but he did not answer.

John Thomas said, "Mum? I'm going to fix my breakfast. Shall I fix some for you, too?"

She glanced at Dreiser, then back at her son and bit her lip. "Never mind," she said grudgingly. "I'll get breakfast. Mr. Dreiser, will you have coffee with us?"

The atmosphere mellowed during breakfast; by the time John Thomas had two dishes of oatmeal, scrambled eggs and toast, and a pint of cocoa

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inside him, he was ready to concede that Chief Dreiser had been doing his duty and probably didn't kick dogs for pleasure. In turn, the Chief, under the influence of food, had decided that there was nothing wrong with the boy that a firm hand and an occasional thrashing would not cure. He pursued a bit of egg with toast, captured it, and said, "I feel better, Mrs. Stuart, I really do. It's a treat to a widower to taste homecooking — but I won't dare tell my men."

Mrs. Stuart put a hand to her mouth. "Oh, I forgot about them!" She added, "I can have more coffee in a moment. How many are there?"

"Five. But don't bother, ma'am; they'll get breakfast when they go off duty." He turned to John Thomas. "Ready to go, young fellow?"

"Uh —" He turned to his mother. "Why not fix breakfast for them, Mum? I've still got to wake Lummox and feed him."

By the time Lummox had been wakened and fed and had had matters explained to him, by the time five patrolmen had each enjoyed a second cup of coffee after a hot meal, the feeling was more that of a social event than an arrest.

It was 9 o'clock before they got Lummox backed into the temporary cage outside the courthouse. Lummox had been delighted by the smell of steel and had wanted to stop and nibble it; John Thomas was forced to be firm. He went inside with Lummox and petted him and talked to him while the door was welded shut. He had been worried when he saw the massive steel cage, for he had never got around to telling Chief Dreiser that steel was less than useless against Lummox.

Now it seemed too late, especially as the Chief was proud of the pen. There had been no time to pour a foundation, so the Chief had ordered an open-work box of steel girders, top, bottom, and sides, with one end left open until Lummox could be shut in.

Well, thought John Thomas, they all knew so much and they didn't bother to ask me. He decided simply to warn Lummox not to eat a bite of the cage, under dire threats of punishment — and hope for the best.

Now that he had time John Thomas was anxious to examine something on Lummox which had been worrying him. He had first noticed the symptoms on the morning following Lummox's disastrous stroll, two swellings located where Lummox's shoulders would have been had he been so equipped. Yesterday they had seemed larger, which disturbed him, for he hoped that they were just bruises — not that Lummox bruised easily.

Dog take it! the swellings were bigger than ever, real tumors now, and the hide over them seemed softer and thinner, not quite the armor that encased Lummox elsewhere. John Thomas wondered if a person like Lummox could get cancer, say from a bruise? Lummox had never been ill as

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far back as John Thomas could remember, nor had his father ever mentioned Lummox having anything wrong with him. Lummox was the same today, yesterday, and always — except that he kept getting bigger.

He would have to look over his grandfather's diary tonight and his great-grandfather's notes. Maybe he had missed something —

He pressed one of the swellings, trying to dig his fingers in; Lummox stirred restlessly. John Thomas stopped and said anxiously, "Does that hurt?"

"No," the childish voice answered, "it *tickles*."

The answer did not reassure him. He knew that Lummox was ticklish, but it usually took something like a pickaxe to accomplish it. The swellings must be very sensitive. He was about to investigate farther when he was hailed from behind.

"John! Johnnie!"

He turned. Betty Sorenson was outside the cage. "Hi, Slugger," he called to her. "You got my message?"

"Yes, but not until after 8 o'clock. You know the dorm rules. Hi, Lummox. How's my baby?"

"Fine," said Lummox.

"That's why I recorded," John Thomas answered. "The idiots roused me out of bed before daylight. Silly."

"Do you good to see a sunrise. But what is all this rush? I thought the hearing was next week?"

"It was supposed to be. But some heavyweight from the Department of Space is coming out from Capital."

"*What?*"

"What's the matter?"

"The matter? Why, everything! I don't know this man from Capital. I thought I was going to have to deal with Judge O'Farrell — I know what makes him tick. This new judge . . . well, I don't know. In the second place, I've got ideas I haven't had time to work out yet." She frowned. "We'll have to get a postponement."

"What for?" asked John Thomas. "Why don't we just go into court and tell the truth?"

"Johnnie, you're hopeless. If that was all there was to it, there wouldn't be any courts."

"Maybe that would be an improvement."

"But — Look, Knothead, don't stand there making silly noises. If we have to appear in less than an hour —" She glanced up at the clock tower on the ancient courthouse. "A good deal less. We've got to move fast. At the very least, we've got to get that homestead claim recorded."

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"That's silly. They won't take it, I tell you. We can't homestead Lummox. He's not a piece of land."

"A man can homestead a cow, two horses, a dozen pigs. A carpenter can homestead his tools. An actress can homestead her wardrobe."

"But that's not 'homesteading.' I took the same course in commercial law that you did. They'll laugh at you."

"Don't quibble. It's section II of the same law. If you were exhibiting Lummie in a carnival, he'd be the 'tools of your trade,' wouldn't he? It's up to them to prove he isn't. The thing is to register Lummox as exempt from lien before somebody gets a judgment against you."

"If they can't collect from me, they'll collect from my mother."

"No, they won't. I checked that. Since your father put the money in a trust, legally she hasn't got a dime."

"Is that the law?" he asked doubtfully.

"Oh, hurry up! The law is whatever you can convince a court it is."

"Betty, you've got a twisted mind." He slid out between the bars, turned and said, "Lummie, I'll only be gone a minute. You stay here."

"Why?" asked Lummox.

"Never mind 'why.' You wait for me here."

"All right."

There was a crowd on the courthouse lawn, people gawking at Lummox in his new notoriety. Chief Dreiser had ordered rope barriers erected and a couple of his men were present to see that they were respected. The two young people ducked under the ropes and pushed through the crowd to the courthouse steps. The county clerk's office was on the second floor; there they found his chief deputy, an elderly maiden lady.

Miss Schreiber took the same view of registering Lummox as free from judgment that John Thomas did. But Betty pointed out that it was not up to the county clerk to decide what was an eligible chattel under the law, and cited an entirely fictitious case about a man who homesteaded a multiple echo. Miss Schreiber reluctantly filled out forms, accepted the modest fee, and gave them a certified copy.

It was almost 10 o'clock. John Thomas hurried out and started downstairs. He stopped when he saw that Betty had paused at a penny weighing machine. "Come on, Betty," he demanded. "This is no time for that."

"I'm not weighing myself," she answered while staring into the mirror attached to it. "I'm checking my make-up. I've got to look my best."

"You look all right."

"Why, Johnnie, a compliment!"

"It wasn't a compliment. Hurry up. I've got to tell Lummox something."

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"Throttle back and hold at ten thousand. I'll bring you in." She wiped off her eyebrows, painted them back in the smart Madame Satan pattern, and decided that it made her look older. She considered adding a rolling-dice design on her right cheek, but skipped it as Johnnie was about to boil over. They hurried down and out the lobby.

More moments were wasted convincing a policeman that they belonged inside the barrier. Johnnie saw that two men were standing by Lummox's cage. He broke into a run. "Hey! You two! Get away from there."

Judge O'Farrell turned around and blinked. "What is your interest, young man?" The other man turned but said nothing.

"Me? Why, I'm his owner. He's not used to strangers. So go back of the rope, will you?" He turned to Lummox. "It's all right, baby. Johnnie's here."

"Howdy, Judge."

"Oh. Hello, Betty." The judge looked at her as if trying to decide why she was present, then turned to John Thomas. "You must be the Stuart boy. I'm Judge O'Farrell."

"Oh. Excuse me, Judge," John Thomas answered, his ears turning pink. "I thought you were a sightseer."

"A natural error. Mr. Greenberg, this is the Stuart boy — John Thomas Stuart. Young man, this is the Honorable Sergei Greenberg, Special Commissioner for the Department of Spatial Affairs."

He looked around. "Oh yes — this is Miss Betty Sorenson, Mr. Commissioner. Betty, why have you done those silly things to your face?"

She ignored him with dignity. "Honored to meet you, Mr. Commissioner."

"Just 'Mr. Greenberg,' please, Miss Sorenson." Greenberg turned to Johnnie. "Any relation to *the* John Thomas Stuart?"

"I'm John Thomas Stuart the Eleventh," Johnnie answered simply. "I suppose you mean my great-great-great-grandfather."

"I guess that would be it. I was born on Mars, almost within sight of his statue. I had no idea your family was mixed up in this. Perhaps we can have a gab about Martian history later."

"I've never been to Mars," Johnnie admitted.

"No? That's surprising. But you're young yet."

Betty listened, ears almost twitching, and decided that this judge, if that was what he was, would be an even softer mark than Judge O'Farrell. It was hard to remember that Johnnie's name meant anything special — especially since it didn't. Not around Westville.

Greenberg went on, "You've made me lose two bets, Mr. Stuart."

"Sir?"

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"I thought this creature would prove not to be from 'Out There.' I was wrong; that big fellow is certainly not native to Earth. But I was equally sure that, if he *was* e.-t., I could attribute him. I'm not an exotic zoologist, but in my business one has to keep skimming such things — look at the pictures at least. But I'm stumped. What is he and where did he come from?"

"Uh, why, he's just Lummox. That's what we call him. My great-grandfather brought him back in the *Trail Blazer* — her second trip."

"That long ago, eh? Well, that clears up some of the mystery; that was before DepSpace kept records — in fact before there was such a department. But I still don't see how this fellow could have missed making a splash in the history books."

"Oh, that — Well, sir, the captain didn't know Lummox was aboard. Great-granddad brought him aboard in his jump bag and sneaked him off the ship the same way."

"In his *jump bag?*" Greenberg stared at Lummox's out-sized figure.

"Yes, sir. Of course Lummie was smaller then."

"So I am forced to believe."

"I've got pictures of him. He was about the size of a collie pup. More legs, of course."

"Mmmm, yes. More legs. And he puts me more in mind of a triceratops than a collie. Isn't he expensive to feed?"

"Oh, no, Lummie eats anything. Well, almost anything," John Thomas amended hastily, glancing self-consciously at the steel bars. "Or he can go without eating for a long time. Can't you, Lummie?"

Lummox had been lying with his legs retracted, exhibiting the timeless patience which he could muster when necessary. He was listening to his chum and Mr. Greenberg while keeping an eye on Betty and the judge. He now opened his enormous mouth. "Yes, but I don't like it."

Mr. Greenberg raised his eyebrows and said, "I hadn't realized that he was a speech-center type."

"A what? Oh, sure. Lummie's been talking since my father was a boy; he just sort of picked it up. I meant to introduce you. Here, Lummie — I want you to meet Mr. Commissioner Greenberg."

Lummox looked at Greenberg without interest and said, "How do you do, Mr. Commissioner Greenberg," saying the formula phrase clearly but not doing so well on the name and title.

"Uh, how do you do, Lummox." He was staring at Lummox when the courthouse clock sounded the hour. Judge O'Farrell turned and spoke to him.

"Ten o'clock, Mr. Commissioner. I suppose we had better get started."

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"No hurry," Greenberg answered absent-mindedly, "since the party can't start until we get there. I'm interested in this line of investigation. Mr. Stuart, what is Lummox's R.I.Q. on the human scale?"

"Huh? Oh, his relative intelligence quotient. I don't know, sir."

"Good gracious, hasn't anyone ever tried to find out?"

"Well, no, sir — I mean 'yes, sir.' Somebody did run some tests on him back in my grandfather's time, but granddad got so sore over the way they were treating Lummie that he chucked them out. Since then we've kept strangers away from Lummie, mostly. But he's real bright. Try him."

Judge O'Farrell whispered to Greenberg, "The brute isn't as bright as a good bird dog, even if he can parrot human speech a little. I know."

John Thomas said indignantly, "I heard that, Judge. You're just prejudiced!"

The Judge started to answer but Betty cut across him. "Johnnie! You know what I told you — I'll do the talking."

Greenberg ignored the interruption. "Has any attempt been made to learn his language?"

"Sir?"

"Mmm, apparently not. And he may have been brought here before he was old enough to talk — his own language I mean. But he must have had one; it's a truism among xenists that speech centers are found only in nervous systems that use them. That is to say, he could not have learned human speech as speech, even poorly, unless his own breed used oral communication. Can he write?"

"How could he, sir? He doesn't have hands."

"Mmm, yes. Well, taking a running jump with the aid of theory, I'll bet on a relative score of less than 40, then. Xenologists have found that high types, equivalent to humans, always have three characteristics: speech centers, manipulation, and from these two, record keeping. So we can assume that Lummox's breed was left at the post. Studied any xenology?"

"Not much, sir," John Thomas admitted shyly, "except books I could find in the library. But I mean to major in xenology and exotic biology in college."

"Good for you. It's a wide open field. You'd be surprised how difficult it is to hire enough xenists just for DepSpace. But my reason for asking was this: as you know, the department has intervened in this case. Because of *him*." Greenberg gestured at Lummox. "There was a chance that your pet might be of a race having treaty rights with us. Once or twice, strange as it may seem, a foreigner visiting this planet has been mistaken for a wild animal, with . . . shall we say 'unfortunate' results?" Greenberg frowned, recalling the terrible, hushed-up occasion when a member of the official

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family of the Ambassador from Llador had been found, dead and stuffed, in a curiosity shop in the Virgin Islands. "But no such hazard exists here."

"Oh. I guess not, sir. Lummox is . . . well, he's just a member of our family."

"Precisely." The commissioner spoke to Judge O'Farrell. "May I consult with you a moment, Judge? Privately?"

"Certainly, sir."

The men moved away; Betty joined John Thomas. "It's a cinch," she whispered, "if you can keep from making more breaks."

"What did I do?" he protested. "And what makes you think it's going to be easy?"

"It's obvious. He likes you, he likes Lummox."

"I don't see how that pays for the ground floor of the Bon Marché. Or all those lamp posts."

"Just keep your blood pressure down and follow my lead. Before we are through, they'll be paying us."

A short distance away Mr. Greenberg was saying to Judge O'Farrell, "Judge, from what I have learned it seems to me that the Department of Spatial Affairs should withdraw from this case."

"Eh? I don't follow you, sir."

"Let me explain. What I would like to do is to postpone the hearing twenty-four hours while I have my conclusions checked by the department. Then I can withdraw and let the local authorities handle it. Meaning you, of course."

Judge O'Farrell pursed his lips. "I don't like last-minute postponements, Mr. Commissioner. It has always seemed unfair to me to order busy people to gather together, to their expense and personal inconvenience, then tell them to come back another day. It doesn't have the flavor of justice."

Greenberg frowned. "True. Let me see if we can arrive at it another way. From what young Stuart tells me I am certain that this case is not one calling for intervention under the Federation's xenic policies, even though the center of interest is extra-terrestrial and therefore a legal cause for intervention if needed. Although the department has the power, that power is exercised only when necessary to avoid trouble with governments of other planets. Earth has hundreds of thousands of e.-t. animals; it has better than 30,000 non-human xenians, either residents or visitors, having legal status under treaties as 'human' even though they are obviously non-human. Xenophobia being what it is, each of those foreigners is a potential source of trouble in our foreign relations.

"Forgive me for saying what you already know; it is a necessary foundation. The department can't go around wiping the noses of all our xenic

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visitors — even those that have noses. We haven't the personnel and certainly not the inclination. If one of them gets into trouble, it is usually sufficient to advise the local magistrate of our treaty obligations to the xenian's home planet. In rare cases the department intervenes. This, in my opinion, is not such a case. In the first place it seems that our friend Lummox here is an 'animal' under the law and —"

"Was there doubt?" the judge asked in astonishment.

"There might have been. That's why I am here. But, despite his limited ability to talk, his other limitations would keep such a breed from rising to a level where we could accept it as civilized; therefore he is an animal. Therefore he has only the usual rights of animals under our humane laws. Therefore the department need not concern itself."

"I see. Well, no one is going to be cruel to him, not in my court."

"Certainly. But for another quite sufficient reason the department is not interested. Let us suppose that this creature is 'human' in the sense that law and custom and treaty have attached to that word since we first made contact with the Great Race of Mars. He is not, but suppose it."

"Stipulated," agreed Judge O'Farrell.

"We stipulate it. Nevertheless he cannot be a concern of the department because — Judge, do you know the history of the *Trail Blazer*?"

"Vaguely, from grammar school days."

"Well, the *Trail Blazer* made three of the first interspatial transition flights, when such flights were as reckless as the voyage Columbus attempted. They did not know where they were going and they had only hazy notions about how to get back — in fact the *Trail Blazer* never came back from her third trip."

"Yes, yes. I remember."

"The point is, young Stuart — I can't call him by his full name; it doesn't seem right — Stuart tells me that this loutish creature with the silly smile is a souvenir of the *Trail Blazer*'s second cruise. That's all I need to know. We have no treaties with any of the planets she visited, no trade, no intercourse of any sort. Legally they don't exist. Therefore the only laws that apply to Lummox are our own domestic laws; therefore the department should not intervene — and even if it did, a special master such as myself would be obliged to rule entirely by domestic law. Which you are better qualified to do than I."

Judge O'Farrell nodded. "Well, I have no objection to resuming jurisdiction. Shall we go in?"

"Just a moment. I suggested a delay because this case has curious features. I wanted to refer back to the department to make sure that my theory is correct and that I have not missed some important precedent or law. But

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I am willing to withdraw at once if you can assure me of one thing. This creature — I understand that, despite its mild appearance, it turned out to be destructive, even dangerous?"

O'Farrell nodded. "So I understand."

"Well, has there been any demand that it be destroyed?"

"Well," the judge answered slowly, "it has come to my attention privately that our chief of police intends to ask the court to order the animal's destruction as a public safety measure. I anticipate prayers from private sources as well."

Mr. Greenberg looked worried. "As bad as that? Well, Judge, what is your attitude? If you try the case, are you going to let the animal be destroyed?"

Judge O'Farrell retorted, "Sir, that is an improper question."

Greenberg turned red. "I beg your pardon. But I must get at it in some fashion. You realize that this specimen is unique? Regardless of what it has done, or how dangerous it may be, nevertheless its interest to science is such that it should be preserved."

"Young man, you are urging me to prejudge a case, or a portion of a case. Your attitude is most improper!"

Chief Dreiser chose this bad time to come hurrying up. "Judge, I've been looking all over for you. Is this hearing going to take place? I've got seven men who —"

O'Farrell interrupted him. "Chief, this is Mr. Commissioner Greenberg. Mr. Commissioner, our Chief of Safety."

"Honored, Chief."

"Howdy, Mr. Commissioner. Gentlemen, about this hearing. I'd like to know —"

"Chief," the judge interrupted brusquely, "just tell my bailiff to hold things in readiness. Now leave us in private, if you please."

"But —" The chief shut up and backed away, while muttering something excusable in a harassed policeman. O'Farrell turned back to Greenberg.

The commissioner had had time during the interruption to recall that he was supposed to be without personal emotions. He said smoothly, "I withdraw the question, Judge. I had no intention of committing an impropriety.

"But I still have a problem. You know that I could insist on postponement while I consult the department?"

"Certainly. Perhaps you should. Your decision should not be affected by my opinions."

"No. But I agree with you; last-minute postponements are vexatious." He was thinking that to refer to the department, in this odd case, meant to

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consult Mr. Kiku — and he could hear the Under Secretary making disgusted remarks about "initiative" and "responsibility" and "for heaven's sake, couldn't anyone else around this madhouse make a simple decision?" Greenberg made up his mind. "I think it is best for the department to continue intervention. I'll take it, at least through a preliminary hearing."

O'Farrell smiled broadly. "I had hoped that you would. I'm looking forward to hearing you. I understand that you gentlemen from the Department of Spatial Affairs sometimes hand out an unusual brand of law."

They started back to the courthouse. Chief Dreiser, who had been fuming some distance away, saw that Judge O'Farrell had forgotten him. He started to follow, then noted that the Stuart boy and Betty Sorenson were still on the other side of Lummox's cage. They had their heads together and did not notice that the two magistrates were leaving. Dreiser strode over to them.

"Hey! Inside with you, Johnnie Stuart! You were supposed to be in court twenty minutes ago."

John Thomas looked startled. "But I thought —" he began, then noticed that the judge and Mr. Greenberg had gone. "Oh! Just a minute, Mr. Dreiser — I've got something to say to Lummox."

"You've got nothing to say to that beast now. Come along."

"But, Chief —"

Mr. Dreiser grabbed his arm and started to move away. Since he outweighed John Thomas by nearly one hundred pounds Johnnie moved with him. Betty interrupted with, "Deacon Dreiser! What a nasty way to behave!"

"That'll be enough out of you, young lady," Dreiser answered. He continued toward the courthouse with John Thomas in tow. Betty shut up and followed.

John Thomas gave in to the inevitable. He had intended to impress on Lummox, at the very last minute, the necessity of remaining quiet, staying put, and not eating the steel bars. But Mr. Dreiser would not listen. It seemed to John that most of the older people in the world spent much of their time not listening.

Lummox had not missed their exit. He stood up, filling the enclosed space, and stared after John Thomas, while wondering what to do. The bars creaked as he brushed against them. Betty looked back and said, "Lummox! You wait there! We'll be back."

Lummox remained standing, staring after them and thinking about it. An order from Betty wasn't really an order. Or was it? There were precedents in the past to think over.

Presently he lay down again.

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IV

As O'Farrell and Greenberg entered the room the bailiff shouted, "Order in the court!" The babble died down and spectators tried to find seats. A young man wearing a hat and hung about with paraphernalia stepped into the path of the two officials. "Hold it!" he said and photographed them. "One more — and give us a smile, Judge, like the Commissioner had just said something funny."

"One is enough. And take off that hat." O'Farrell brushed past him. The man shrugged but did not take off his hat.

The clerk of the court looked up as they approached. His face was red and sweaty, and he had his tools spread out on the justice's bench. "Sorry, Judge," he said. "Half a moment." He bent over a microphone and intoned, "Testing . . . one, two, three, four . . . Cincinnati . . . sixty-six." He looked up. "I've had more grief with this recording system today."

"You should have checked it earlier."

"So help me, Judge, I did check it; it was running sweet. Then when I switched it on at ten minutes to 10, a transistor quit and it's been an endless job to locate the trouble."

"All right," O'Farrell answered testily, annoyed that it should happen in the presence of a distinguished visitor. "Get my bench clear of your implements, will you?"

Greenberg said hastily, "If it's all the same to you, I won't use the bench. We'll gather around a big table, court-martial style. I find it speeds things up."

O'Farrell looked unhappy. "I have always maintained the ancient formalities in this court. I find it worthwhile."

"Very likely. I suppose that those of us who have to try cases anywhere and everywhere get into sloppy habits. But we can't help it. Take Minatare for example; suppose you attempted, out of politeness, to conform to their customs in trying a case. They don't think a judge is worth a hoot unless he undergoes a cleansing fast before he mounts the judge's sphere — then he has to stay up there without food or drink until he reaches a decision. Frankly, I couldn't take it. Could you?"

Judge O'Farrell felt annoyed that this glib young man should imply that there could be a parallel between the seemly rituals of his court and such heathen practices. He recalled uneasily the three stacks of wheat cakes, adorned with sausage and eggs, with which he had started the day. "Well — 'other times, other customs,' " he said grudgingly.

"Exactly. And thanks for indulging me." Greenberg motioned to the bailiff; the two started shoving attorneys' tables together to make one big

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one before O'Farrell could make clear that he had quoted the old saw for the purpose of rebutting it. Shortly, about fifteen people were seated around the composite table and Greenberg had sent the bailiff out to find ash trays. He turned to the clerk, who was now at his control desk, wearing earphones and crouching over his instruments. "Is your equipment working now?"

The clerk pressed a thumb and forefinger together. "Rolling."

"Very well. Court's in session."

The clerk spoke into his mike, announcing time, date, place, nature and jurisdiction of the court, and the name and title of the special master presiding, reading the last and mispronouncing Sergei Greenberg's first name; Greenberg did not correct him. The bailiff came in, his hands full of ash trays, and said hastily, "Oyez! Oyez! Let all who have business before this court gather nigh and —"

"Never mind," Greenberg interrupted. "Thanks anyhow. This court will now hold a preliminary hearing on any and all issues relating to the actions last Monday of an extra-terrestrial creature locally resident and known as 'Lummox.' I refer to that big brute in a cage outside this building. Bailiff, go get a picture of him, please, and insert it in the record."

"Right away, your honor."

"The court wishes to announce that this hearing may be converted to a final determination on any or all issues at any time, if the court so announces and subject to objection and ruling at the time. In other words, don't hold your fire; this may be your only day in court. Oh yes — the court will receive petitions relating to this extra-terrestrial as well as hear issues."

"Question, your honor."

"Yes?"

"May it please the court: my client and I have no objection if all that we are engaged in is a preliminary inquiry. But will we return to accepted procedures if we go on to terminer?"

"This court, being convened by the Federation and acting in accordance with the body of law called 'Customs of Civilizations' in brief and consisting of agreements, treaties, precedents, et cetera, between two or more planets of the Federation, or with other civilizations with which member planets of the Federation have diplomatic relations, is not bound by local procedures. It is the purpose of this court to arrive at the truth and, from there, to reach equity . . . equity under the Law. The court will not trample on local law and custom except where they are hopelessly opposed to superior law. But where local custom is merely ritualistic, this court will ignore formality and get on with its business. Understand me?"

"Er, I believe so, sir. I may take exception later." The small, middle-aged man who spoke seemed embarrassed.

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"Anyone may object at any time for any reason and be heard. Also you may appeal from my decisions. However —" Greenberg grinned warmly, "— I doubt if it will do you much good. So far I have been pretty lucky in having my decisions upheld."

"I did not intend to imply," the man answered stiffly, "that the court was not properly —"

"Sure, sure! Let's get on with it." Greenberg picked up a stack of papers. "Here is a civil action 'Bon Marché Merchandising Corporation *versus* "Lummox," John Thomas Stuart XI —" ("*That name still bothers me*," he said in an aside to Judge O'Farrell.) "— Marie Brandley Stuart, *et al.*,' and another one like it for the Western Mutual Assurance Company, insurers of Bon Marché. Here is another, same defendants, brought by K. Ito and his insurance company, um, New World Casualty, Ltd., and one from the City of Westville, same defendants again — and still another brought by Mrs. Isabelle Donahue. Also some criminal matters — one is for harboring a dangerous animal, one for felonious harboring of same, another for negligence and another for maintaining a public nuisance."

John Thomas had been steadily turning white. Greenberg glanced at him and said, "They haven't skipped much, have they, son? Cheer up — the condemned man always eats a hearty breakfast." John Thomas managed a sickly grin. Betty found his knee under the table and patted it.

There was another paper in the stack; Greenberg shuffled it in with the others without reading it into the record. It was a petition signed by the Chief-of-Safety on behalf of the City of Westville praying the court to order the destruction of a dangerous animal known as "Lummox" and further identified as, etc. Instead Greenberg looked up and said, "Now who's who? You, sir?"

The man addressed was the lawyer who had questioned the court's methods; he identified himself as Alfred Schneider and stated that he was acting both for Western Mutual and for the Bon Marché. "This gentleman beside me is Mr. deGrasse, manager of the store."

"Good. Now the next man, please." Greenberg established that all principals were present, with their attorneys; the roster included, besides himself, Judge O'Farrell, John Thomas, Betty, and Chief Dreiser, the following: Mrs. Donahue and her lawyer Mr. Beanfield, Messrs. Schneider and deGrasse for Bon Marché, Mr. Lombard, city attorney of Westville, the attorney for Mr. Ito's insurance company and Mr. Ito's son (acting for his father), Officers Karnes and Mendoza (witnesses), and John Thomas's mother with the Stuart family lawyer Mr. Postle.

Greenberg said to Postle, "I take it you are also acting for Mr. Stuart."

Betty interrupted with, "Heavens, no! I'm representing Johnnie."

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Greenberg raised his eyebrows. "I was about to ask what you are doing here. Uh, you are an attorney?"

"Well — I'm his counsel."

O'Farrell leaned over and whispered, "This is preposterous, Mr. Commissioner. Of course she is not a lawyer. I know the child. I'm rather fond of her — but frankly, I don't think she is quite bright." He added severely, "Betty, you have no business here. Get out and quit making a fool of yourself."

"Now, see here, Judge —"

"One moment, young lady," Greenberg put in. "Do you have any qualifications to act as counsel for Mr. Stuart?"

"I certainly do. I'm the counsel he wants."

"Mmm, a very strong point. Though perhaps not sufficient." He spoke to John Thomas. "Is that correct?"

"Uh, yes, sir."

Judge O'Farrell whispered, "Don't do it, son! You'll be reversed."

Greenberg whispered back, "That's what I am afraid of." He frowned, then spoke to Mr. Postle. "Are you prepared to act for both mother and son?"

"Yes."

"*No!*" Betty contradicted.

"Eh? Wouldn't Mr. Stuart's interests be better protected in the hands of an attorney than in yours? No, don't answer; I want Mr. Stuart to answer."

John Thomas turned pink and managed to mutter, "I don't want him."

"Why?"

John Thomas looked stubborn. Betty said scornfully, "Because his mother doesn't like Lummox, that's why. And —"

"That's not true!" Mrs. Stuart cut in sharply.

"It is true — and that old fossil Postle is stringing along with her. They want to get rid of Lummie, both of them!"

O'Farrell coughed in his handkerchief. Postle turned red. Greenberg said gravely, "Young lady, you will stand and apologize to Mr. Postle."

Betty looked at the Commissioner, dropped her eyes and stood up. She said humbly, "Mr. Postle, I'm sorry you're a fossil. I mean I'm sorry I said you were a fossil."

"Sit down," Greenberg said soberly. "Mind your manners hereafter. Mr. Stuart, no one is required to accept counsel not of his choice. But you place me in a dilemma. Legally you are a minor child; you have chosen as counsel another minor child. It won't look well in the record." He pulled at his chin. "Could it be that you . . . or your counsel . . . or both of you . . . are trying to cause a mistrial?"

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"Uh, no, sir." Betty looked smugly virtuous; it was a possibility she had counted on but had not mentioned to Johnnie.

"Hmm . . ."

"Your honor —"

"Yes, Mr. Lombard?"

"This strikes me as ridiculous. This girl has no standing. She is not a member of the bar; obviously she can't function as an attorney. I dislike finding myself in the position of instructing the court but the obvious thing to do is to put her outside the bar and appoint counsel. May I suggest that the Public Defender is present and prepared?"

"You may so suggest. Is that all, Mr. City Attorney?"

"Uh, yes, your honor."

"May I say that the court also finds it distasteful for you to instruct the court; you will not do so again."

"Er . . . yes, your honor."

"This court will make its own mistakes in its own way. Under the customs by which this court is convened it is not necessary that a counsel be qualified formally — in your idiom, be a 'member of the bar,' a licensed lawyer. If you find that rule unusual, let me assure you that the hereditary lawyer-priests of Deflai find it much more astonishing. But it is the only rule which can be applied everywhere. Nevertheless I thank you for your suggestion. Will the Public Defender stand up?"

"Here, your honor. Cyrus Andrews."

"Thank you. Are you prepared to act?"

"Yes. I'll need a recess to consult with my principal."

"Naturally. Well, Mr. Stuart? Shall the court appoint Mr. Andrews as your counsel? Or associate counsel?"

"No!" Again Betty answered.

"I was addressing Mr. Stuart, Miss Sorenson. Well?"

John Thomas glanced at Betty. "No, your honor."

"Why not?"

"I'll answer that," Betty put in. "I talk faster than he does; that's why I'm counsel. We won't take Mr. Andrews because the City Attorney is against us on one of these silly things they've got about Lummox — and the City Attorney and Mr. Andrews are law partners when they are not fighting sham battles in court!"

Greenberg turned to Andrews. "Is that correct, sir?"

"Why, yes, we're law partners, your honor. You will understand that, in a town this size —"

"I quite understand. I also understand Miss Sorenson's objection. Thank you, Mr. Andrews. Stand down."

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"Mr. Greenberg?"

"What is it now, young lady?"

"I can get you part way off the spot. You see, I had a dirty hunch that some busybody would try to keep me out of it. So we fixed it up ahead of time. I'm half owner."

"Half owner?"

"Of Lummox. See?" She took a paper from her bag and offered it. "A bill of sale, all legal and proper. At least it ought to be, I copied it out of the book."

Greenberg studied it. "The form appears correct. The date is yesterday — which would make you voluntarily liable, to the extent of your interest, from a civil standpoint. It would not affect criminal matters of earlier date."

"Oh, pooh! There aren't any criminal matters."

"That remains to be determined. And don't say 'pooh'; it is not a legal term. The question here is whether or not the signer can vend this interest. Who owns Lummox?"

"Why, Johnnie does! It was in his father's will."

"So? Is that stipulated, Mr. Postle?"

Mr. Postle whispered with Mrs. Stuart, then answered, "So stipulated, your honor. This creature called 'Lummox' is a chattel of John Thomas Stuart, a minor child. Mrs. Stuart's interest is through her son."

"Very well." Greenberg handed the bill of sale to the clerk. "Read it into the record."

"Let the record show that you two, having been duly warned and advised, persist in acting as your own counsel. The court regretfully assumes the burden of protecting your rights and advising you as to the law."

"Oh, don't feel bad, Mr. Greenberg. We trust you."

"I'd rather you didn't," he said drily. "But let's move on. That gentleman down at the end — who are you?"

"Me, Judge? I'm the Galactic Press stringer around here. Name of Hovey."

"So? The clerk will supply a transcript for the press. I'll be available for the usual interview later, if anyone wants it. No pictures of me with this creature Lummox, however. Are there any more gentlemen of the press?"

Two others stood up. "The bailiff will place chairs for you just beyond the rail."

"Yes, Judge. But first —"

"Outside the rail, please." Greenberg looked around. "I think that's all — no, that gentleman down there. Your name, sir?"

The man addressed stood up. He was dressed in formal jacket and striped gray shorts and held himself with self-conscious dignity. "May it please

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the court, my name, sir, is T. Omar Esklund, Doctor of Philosophy."

"It neither pleases nor displeases the court, Doctor. Are you a party to any of these issues?"

"I am, sir. I appear here as *amicus curiae*, a friend of the court."

Greenberg frowned. "This court insists on choosing its own friends. State your business, Doctor."

"Sir, if you will permit me. I am State Executive Secretary of the Keep Earth Human League." Greenberg suppressed a groan but Esklund did not notice as he had looked down to pick up a large manuscript. "As is well known, ever since the inception of the unGodly practice of space travel, our native Earth, given to us by Divine law, has been increasingly overrun by creatures — 'beasts' rather let us say — of dubious origin. The pestilential consequences of this unholy traffic are seen on every —"

"Doctor Esklund!"

"Sir?"

"What is your business with this court? Are you a principal to any of the issues before it?"

"Well, not in so many words, your honor. In a broader sense, I am an advocate for all mankind. The society of which I have the honor —"

"Do you have *any* business? A petition, perhaps?"

"Yes," Esklund answered sullenly, "I have a petition."

"Produce it."

Esklund fumbled among his papers, drew out one; it was passed to Greenberg, who did not look at it. "Now state briefly, for the record, the nature of your petition. Speak clearly and toward the nearest microphone."

"Well . . . may it please the court: the society of which I have the honor of being an officer — a league, if I may so say, embracing all mankind — prays . . . nay, *demands* that this unEarthly beast which has already ravaged this fair community be destroyed. Such destruction is sanctioned and, yes, commanded by those sacred —"

"Is that your petition? You want this court to order the destruction of the e.-t. known as Lummox?"

"Yes, but more than that, I have here a careful documentation of the arguments — unanswerable arguments I may say, to —"

"Just a moment. That word 'demands' which you used; does it appear in the petition?"

"No, your honor, that came from my heart, from the fullness of —"

"Your heart has just led you into contempt. Do you wish to rephrase it?"

Esklund stared, then said grudgingly, "I withdraw the word. No contempt was intended."

"Very well. The petition is received; the clerk will record it. Decision

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later. Now as to that speech you wished to make: from the size of your manuscript I surmise that you will require about two hours?"

"I believe that will be ample, your honor," Esklund answered, somewhat mollified.

"Good. Bailiff!"

"Your honor?"

"Can you dig up a soap box?"

"Why, I believe so, sir."

"Excellent. Place it on the lawn outside. Doctor Esklund, everyone of us enjoys free speech — so enjoy yourself. That soap box is yours for the next two hours."

Dr. Esklund turned the color of eggplant. "You'll hear from us!"

"No doubt."

"We know your sort! Traitors to mankind. Renegades! Trifling with —"

"Remove him."

The bailiff did so, grinning. One of the reporters followed them out. Greenberg said gently, "We seem to have trimmed it down to indispensables now. We have several issues before us, but they have in common the same sheaf of facts. Unless there is objection, we will hear testimony for all issues together, then pass on the issues one at a time. Objection?"

The lawyers looked at each other. Finally Mr. Ito's attorney said, "Your honor, it would seem to me to be fairer to try them one at a time."

"Possibly. But if we do, we'll be here until Christmas. I dislike to make so many busy people go over the same ground repeatedly. But a separate trial of the facts to a jury is your privilege — bearing in mind, if you lose, your principal will have to bear the added costs alone."

Mr. Ito's son tugged at the sleeve of the lawyer and whispered to him. The lawyer nodded and said, "We'll go along with a joint hearing — as to facts."

"Very well. Further objection?" There was none. Greenberg turned to O'Farrell. "Judge, is this room equipped with truth meters?"

"Eh? Why, yes. I hardly ever use them."

"I like them." He turned to the others. "Truth meters will be hooked up. No one is required to use one, but anyone choosing not to will be sworn. This court, as is its privilege, will take judicial notice of and will comment on the fact if anyone refuses the use of a truth meter."

John Thomas whispered to Betty, "Watch your step, Slugger."

She whispered back, "I will, smarty! You watch yours."

Judge O'Farrell said to Greenberg, "It will take some time to rig them. Hadn't we better break for lunch?"

"Oh yes, lunch. Attention, everyone — this court does not recess for

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lunch. I'll ask the bailiff to take orders for coffee and sandwiches or whatever you like while the clerk is rigging the meters. We will eat here at the table. In the meantime —" Greenberg fumbled for cigarettes, fumbled again. "— has anybody got a match?"

Out on the lawn, Lummox, having considered the difficult question of Betty's right to give orders, had come to the conclusion that she possibly had a special status. Each of the John Thomases had introduced into his life a person equivalent to Betty; each had insisted that the person in question must be humored in every whim. This John Thomas had already begun the process with Betty; therefore, it was best to go along with what she wanted as long as it was not too much trouble. He lay down and went to sleep, leaving his watchman eye on guard.

He slept restlessly, disturbed by the tantalizing odor of steel. After a time he woke up and stretched, causing the cage to bulge. It seemed to him that John Thomas had been gone an unnecessarily long time. On second thought, he had not liked the way that man had taken John Thomas away — no, he hadn't liked it a bit. He wondered what he should do, if anything? What would John Thomas say, if he were here?

The problem was too complex. He lay down and tasted the bars of his cage. He refrained from eating them; he merely tried them for flavor. A bit grucky, he decided, but good.

Inside, Chief Dreiser had completed his testimony and had been followed by Karnes and Mendoza. No argument had developed and the truth meters had stayed steady; Mr. deGrasse had insisted on amplifying parts of the testimony. Mr. Ito's lawyer stipulated that Mr. Ito had fired at Lummox; Mr. Ito's son was allowed to describe and show photographs of the consequences. Only Mrs. Donahue's testimony was needed to complete the story of L-day.

Greenberg turned to her lawyer. "Mr. Beanfield, will you examine your client, or shall the court continue?"

"Go ahead, your honor. I may add a question or two."

"Your privilege. Mrs. Donahue, tell us what happened."

"I certainly shall. Your honor, friends, distinguished visitors, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, nevertheless, in my modest way, I believe I am —"

"Never mind that, Mrs. Donahue. Just the facts. Last Monday afternoon."

She sniffed. "Well! I was lying down, trying to snatch a few minutes rest — I have so many responsibilities, clubs and charitable committees and things —"

Greenberg was watching the truth meter over her head. The needle

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wobbled restlessly, but did not kick over into the red enough to set off the warning buzzer. He decided that it was not worth while to caution her.

"— when suddenly I was overcome with a nameless dread."

The needle swung far into the red, a ruby light flashed and the buzzer gave out a loud rude noise. Somebody started to giggle; Greenberg said hastily, "Order in the court. The bailiff is instructed to remove any spectator making a disturbance."

Mrs. Donahue broke off suddenly when the buzzer sounded. Mr. Beanfield, looking grim, touched her sleeve and said, "Never mind that, dear lady. Just tell the court about the noise you heard and what you saw and what you did."

"He's leading the witness," objected Betty.

"Never mind," said Greenberg. "Somebody has to."

"But —"

"Objection overruled. Witness will continue."

"Well! Uh . . . well, I heard this noise and I wondered what in the world it was. I peeked out and there was this great ravening beast charging back and forth and —"

The buzzer sounded again; a dozen spectators laughed. Mrs. Donahue said angrily, "Will somebody shut that silly thing off? How anyone can be expected to testify with that going on is more than I can see."

"Order!" called Greenberg. "If there is more demonstration, the court will find it necessary to hold someone in contempt." He went on to Mrs. Donahue: "Once a witness has accepted the use of the truth meter the decision cannot be changed. But the data supplied by it is instructive merely; the court is not bound by it. Continue."

"Well, I should hope so. I never told a lie in my life."

The buzzer remained silent; Greenberg reflected that she must believe it. "I mean," he added, "that the court makes up its own mind. It does not allow a machine to do so for it."

"My father always said that gadgets like that were spawn of the devil. He said that an honest business man should not —"

"Please, Mrs. Donahue."

Mr. Beanfield whispered to her. Mrs. Donahue went on more quietly, "Well, there was that *thing*, that enormous beast kept by that boy next door. It was eating my rose bushes."

"And what did you do?"

"I didn't know what to do. I grabbed the first thing at hand — a broom, it was — and rushed out doors. The beast came charging at me and —"

Buzzzzzzz!

"Shall we go over that again, Mrs. Donahue?"

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"Well . . . anyhow, I rushed at it and began to beat it on the head. It snapped at me. Those great teeth —"

Buzzzzz!

"Then what happened, Mrs. Donahue?"

"Well, it turned away, the cowardly thing, and ran out of my yard. I don't know where it went. But there was my lovely garden, just *ruined.*" The needle quivered but the buzzer did not sound.

Greenberg turned to the lawyer. "Mr. Beanfield, have you examined the damage to Mrs. Donahue's garden?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Will you tell us the extent of the damage?"

Mr. Beanfield decided that he would rather lose a client than be buzzed in open court by that confounded toy. "Five bushes were eaten, your honor, in whole or in part. There was minor damage to the lawn and a hole made in an ornamental fence."

"Financial damage?"

Mr. Beanfield said carefully, "The amount we are suing for is before you, your honor."

"That is not responsive, Mr. Beanfield."

Mr. Beanfield shrugged mentally and struck Mrs. Donahue off his list of paying properties. "Oh, around a couple of hundred, your honor, in property damage. But the court should allow for inconvenience and mental anguish."

Mrs. Donahue glared at her lawyer. "Well! I have something to add. There is one thing I insist on, absolutely *insist* on, and that is that that dangerous, bloodthirsty beast be *destroyed!*"

Greenberg turned to Beanfield. "Is that a formal prayer, counsellor? Or may we regard it as rhetoric?"

Beanfield looked uncomfortable. "We have such a petition, your honor."

"The court will receive it."

Betty butted in with, "Hey, wait a minute! All Lummie did was eat a few of her measly old —"

"Later, Miss Sorenson."

"But —"

"Later, please. You will have your chance. Does anyone have any new facts to bring out, or does anyone wish to question further any witness? Or bring forward another witness?"

"We do," Betty said at once.

"You do what?"

"We want to call a new witness."

"Very well. Do you have him here?"

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"Yes, your honor. Just outside. Lummox."

Greenberg looked thoughtful. "Do I understand that you are proposing to put, uh, Lummox on the stand in his own defense?"

"Why not? He can talk."

A reporter turned suddenly to a colleague and whispered to him, then hurried out of the room. Greenberg chewed his lip. "I know that," he admitted. "I exchanged a few words with him myself. But the ability to talk does not alone make a competent witness. A child may learn to talk, after a fashion, before it is a year old, but only rarely is a child of tender years — less than five, let us say — found competent to give testimony. The court takes judicial notice that members of non-human races may give evidence. But nothing has been presented to show that this particular extra-terrestrial is competent."

John Thomas whispered worriedly to Betty, "Have you slipped your cams? There's no telling what Lummie would say."

"Hush!" She went on to Greenberg, "Look, Mr. Commissioner, you've said a fancy lot of words, but what do they mean? You are about to pass judgment on Lummox — and you won't even bother to ask him a question. You say he can't give competent evidence. Well, I've seen others around here who didn't do so well. I'll bet if you hook a truth meter to Lummie, it won't buzz. Sure, he did things he shouldn't have done. He ate some scrawny old rose bushes and he ate Mr. Ito's cabbages. What's horrible about that? When you were a kid, did you ever swipe a cookie when you thought nobody was looking?"

She took a deep breath. "Suppose when you swiped that cookie, somebody hit you in the face with a broom? Or fired a gun at you? Wouldn't you be scared? Wouldn't you run? Lummie is friendly. Everybody around here knows that — or at least if they don't, they are stupider and more irresponsible than he is. But did anybody try to reason with him? Oh, no! They bullied him and fired off guns at him and scared him to death and chased him off bridges. You say Lummie is incompetent. Who is competent? All these people who were mean to him ? Or Lummie? Now they want to kill him. If a little boy swiped a cookie, I suppose they'd chop his head off, just to be sure he wouldn't do it again. Is somebody crazy? What kind of a farce is this?"

She stopped, tears running down her cheeks. It was a talent which had been useful in school dramatics; to her own surprise she found that these tears were real.

"Are you through?" asked Greenberg.

"I guess so. For now, anyway."

"I must say that you put it very movingly. But a court should not be

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swayed by emotion. Is it your theory that the major portion of the damage — let us say everything but the rose bushes and the cabbages — arose from improper acts of human beings and therefore cannot be charged to Lummox or his owner?"

"Figure it yourself, your honor. Why not ask Lummie how it looked to him?"

"We'll get to that. On another issue: I cannot grant that your analogy is valid. We are dealing here, not with a little boy, but with an animal. If this court should order the destruction of this animal, it would not be in spirit of vengeance nor of punishment, for an animal is presumed not to understand such values. The purpose would be preventive, in order that a potential danger might not be allowed to develop into damage to life or limb or property. Your little boy can be restrained by the arms of his nurse — but we are dealing with a creature weighing several tons, capable of crushing a man with a careless step. There is no parallel in your cookie-stealing small boy."

"There isn't, huh? That little boy can grow up and wipe out a whole city by pushing one teeny little button. So off with his head! — before he grows up. Don't ask him why he took the cookie, don't ask him anything! He's a bad boy — chop his head off and save trouble."

Greenberg found himself again biting his lip. He said, "It is your wish that we examine Lummox?"

"I said so, didn't I?"

"I'm not sure what you said. The court will consider it."

Mr. Lombard said quickly, "Objection, your honor."

"Hold your objection, please. Court will recess for ten minutes. All will remain." Greenberg got up and walked away. He took out a cigarette, found again that he had no light, stuck the pack back in his pocket.

Blast the girl! He had had it figured how to dispose of this case smoothly, with credit to the department and everybody satisfied — except the Stuart boy, but that could not be helped . . . the boy and this precocious, preposterous young mammal who had him under her wing. And under her thumb, too, he added.

He could not allow this unique specimen to be destroyed. But he had meant to do it suavely . . . deny the petition of that old battle-axe, since it was obviously from malice, and tell the police chief privately to forget the other one. The Save-the-World-for-the-Neanderthals petition didn't matter. But this cocky girl, by talking when she should have listened, was going to make it appear that a departmental court could be pushed into risking public welfare over a lot of sentimental, anthropomorphic bosh!

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The animal's owner was responsible for the damage; there were a thousand "strayed animal" cases to justify a ruling . . . since this was not the planet Tencora. That stuff about its being the fault of the persons who frightened him off was a lot of prattle. But the e.-t., as a specimen for science, was worth far more than the damage.

"Excuse me, your honor. Please don't monkey with those things."

He looked up, ready to snap somebody's head off, to find himself looking at the clerk of the court. He then saw that he had been fiddling with the switches and controls of the clerk's console. He snatched his hands away. "Sorry."

"A person who doesn't understand these things," the clerk said apologetically, "can cause an awful lot of trouble."

"True. Unfortunately true." He turned away sharply. "The court will come to order."

He sat down and turned at once to Miss Sorenson. "The court rules that Lummox is not a competent witness."

Betty gasped. "Your honor, you are being most unfair!"

"Possibly."

She thought for a moment. "We want a change of venue."

"You had one when the department intervened. That ends it. Now keep quiet for a change."

She turned red. "You ought to disqualify yourself!"

Greenberg had intended to be calm, positively Olympian, in his manner. He now found it necessary to take three slow breaths. "Young lady," he said carefully, "you have been trying to confuse the issue all day. There is no need for you to speak now; you have said too much already. Understand me?"

"I have not, I will too, and I didn't either!"

"What? Repeat that, please?"

She looked at him. "No, I had better take it back — or you will be talking about 'contempt.' "

"No, no. I wanted to memorize it. I don't think I have ever heard quite so sweeping a statement. Never mind. Just hold your tongue. You'll be allowed to talk later."

He turned to the others. "The court announced earlier that there would be due notice if we were to continue to terminer. The court sees no reason not to. Objection?"

The attorneys shifted uncomfortably and looked at each other. Greenberg turned to Betty. "How about you?"

She glanced at John Thomas, then said dully, "No objection," then leaned to him and whispered, "Oh, Johnnie, I *tried!*"

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He patted her hand under the table. "I know you did, Slugger."

Greenberg pretended not to hear. He went on in a cold, official voice. "This court has before it a petition asking for the destruction of the extra-terrestrial Lummox on the grounds that it is dangerous and uncontrollable. The facts have not sustained that view; the petition is denied."

Betty gasped and squealed. John Thomas looked startled, then grinned for the first time. "Order, please," Greenberg said mildly. "We have here another petition to the same end, but for different reasons." He held up the one submitted by the Keep Earth Human League. "This court finds itself unable to follow the alleged reasoning. Petition denied.

"We have four criminal charges. I am dismissing all four. The law requires —"

The city attorney looked startled. "But, your honor —"

"If you have a point, will you save it? No criminal intent can be found here, which therefore would make it appear that there could be no crime. However, constructive intent may appear where the law requires a man to exercise due prudence to protect others and it is on this ground that these issues must be judged. Prudence is based on experience, personal or vicarious, not on impossible prescience. In the judgment of this court, the precautions taken were prudent in the light of experience — experience up to last Monday afternoon, that is to say." He turned and addressed John Thomas. "What I mean, young man, is this: your precautions were 'prudent' so far as you knew. Now you know better. If that beast gets loose again, it will go hard with you."

Johnnie swallowed. "Yessir."

"We have remaining the civil matters of damage. Here the criteria are different. The guardian of a minor, or the owner of an animal, is responsible for damage committed by that child or that animal, the law holding that it is better that the owner or guardian suffer than the innocent third party. Except for one point, which I will reserve for the moment, these civil actions fall under that rule. First, let me note that one or more of these issues ask for real, punitive, and exemplary damages. Punitive and exemplary damages are denied; there are no grounds. I believe that we have arrived at real damages in each case and counsels have so stipulated. As to costs, the Department of Spatial Affairs has intervened in the public interest; costs will be borne by the department."

Betty whispered, "A good thing we homesteaded him. Look at those insurance vultures grin."

Greenberg went on, "I reserved one point. The question has been raised indirectly that this Lummox may not be an animal — and therefore not a chattel — but may be a sentient being within the meaning of the 'Customs

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of Civilizations' — and therefore his own master." Greenberg hesitated. He was about to add his bit to the "Customs of Civilizations"; he was anxious not to be overruled. "We have long disavowed slavery; no sentient being may be owned. But if Lummox is sentient, what have we? May Lummox be held personally responsible? It would not appear that he has sufficient knowledge of our customs, nor does it appear that he is among us by his own choice. Are the putative owners in fact his guardians and in that way responsible? All these questions turn on this: is Lummox a chattel, or a free being?

"This court expressed its opinion when it ruled that Lummox might not testify — at this time. But this court is not equipped to render a final decision, no matter how strongly it may believe that Lummox is an animal.

"The court will therefore start proceedings on its own motion to determine the status of Lummox. In the meantime the local authorities will take charge of Lummox and will be held responsible both for his safety and for public safety with respect to him." Greenberg shut up and sat back.

A fly would have had his choice of open mouths. First to recover was the attorney for Western Mutual, Mr. Schneider. "Your honor? Where does that leave *us*?"

"I don't know."

"But — see here, your honor, let's face the facts. Mrs. Stuart hasn't any property or funds that can be attached; she's the beneficiary of a trust. Same for the boy. We expected to levy against the beast itself; he will bring a good price in the proper market. Now you have, if you will permit me, upset the apple cart. Where should we look for relief? Should we sue the city?"

Lombard was on his feet instantly. "Now, look here, you can't sue the city! The city is one of the damaged parties. On that theory —"

"Order," Greenberg said sternly. "None of those questions can be answered now. All civil actions will be continued until the status of Lummox is clarified." He looked at the ceiling. "There is another possibility. It would seem that this creature came to Earth in the *Trail Blazer*. If my memory of history serves, all specimens brought back by that ship were government property. If Lummox is a chattel, he may nevertheless not be private property. In that event, the source of relief may be a matter of more involved litigation."

Mr. Schneider looked stunned, Mr. Lombard looked angry, John Thomas looked confused and whispered to Betty, "What's he trying to say? Lummox belongs to me."

"Ssh —" Betty whispered. "I *told* you we would get out of it. Oh, Mr. Greenberg is a honey lamb!"

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Mr. Ito's son had kept quiet except when testifying. Now he stood up. "Your honor?"

"Yes, Mr. Ito?"

"I don't understand any of this. I'm just a farmer. But I do want to know one thing. *Who's going to pay for my father's greenhouses?*"

John Thomas got to his feet. "I am," he said simply.

Betty tugged at his sleeve. "Sit down, you idiot!"

"You hush up, Betty. You've talked enough." Betty hushed up. "Mr. Greenberg, everybody else has been talking. Can I say something?"

"Go ahead."

"I've listened to a lot of stuff all day. People trying to make out that Lummox is dangerous, when he's not. People trying to have him killed, just for spite — yes, I mean you, Mrs. Donahue!"

"Address the court, please," Greenberg said quietly.

"I've heard you say a lot of things, too. I didn't follow all of them but, if you will pardon me, sir, some of them struck me as pretty silly. Excuse me."

"No contempt intended, I'm sure."

"Well . . . take this about whether Lummox is or isn't a chattel. Or whether he's bright enough to vote. Lummox is pretty bright, I guess nobody but me knows just how bright. But he's never had any education and he's never been anywhere. But that hasn't anything to do with who he belongs to. He belongs to *me*. Just the way I belong to him — we grew up together. Now I know I'm responsible for that damage last Monday — will you keep quiet, Betty! I can't pay for it now, but I'll pay for it. I —"

"Just a moment, young man. The court will not permit you to admit liability without counsel. If that is your intention, court will appoint counsel."

"You said I could have my say."

"Continue. Noted for the record that this is not binding."

"Sure, it's binding, because I'm going to do it. Pretty soon my education trust comes due and it would about cover it. I guess I can —"

"John Thomas!" his mother called out sharply. "You'll do no such thing!"

"Mother, you had better keep out of this, too. I was just going to say —"

"You're not to say anything. Your honor, he is —"

"Order!" Greenberg interrupted. "None of this is binding. Let the lad speak."

"Thank you, sir. I was through, anyway. But I've got something to say to *you*, sir, too. Lummie is timid. I can handle him because he trusts me — but if you think I'm going to let a lot of strangers poke him and prod

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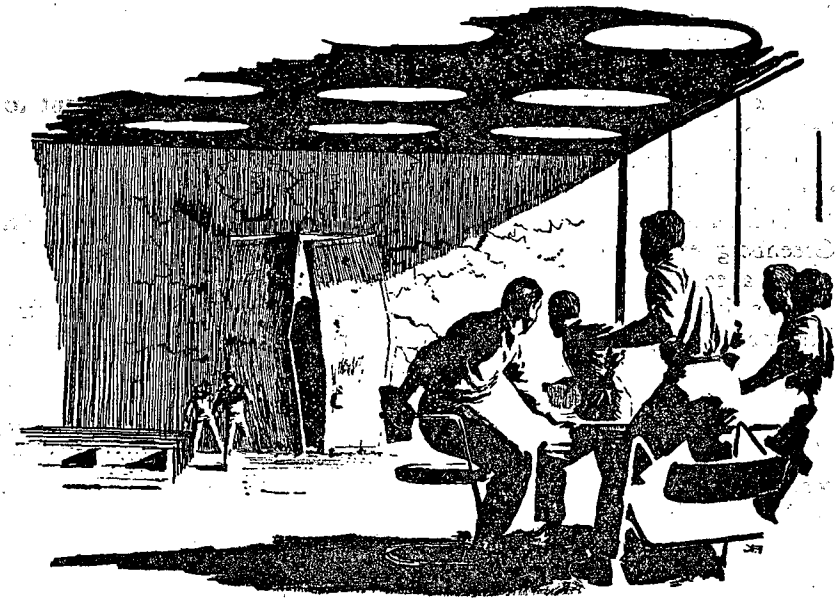

him and ask him silly questions and put him through mazes and things, you'd just better think again — because I won't stand for it! Lummie is sick right now. He's had more excitement than is good for him. The poor thing —"

Lummox had waited for John Thomas longer than he liked because he was not sure where John Thomas had gone. He had seen him disappear in the crowd without being sure whether or not Johnnie had gone into the big house nearby. He had tried to sleep after he woke up the first time, but people had come poking around, and he had had to wake himself up repeatedly because his watchman circuit did not have much judgment. Not that he thought of it that way; he was merely aware that he had come to with his alarms jangling time after time.

At last he decided that it was time he located John Thomas and went home. So he stepped up his hearing to "search" and tried to locate Johnnie. He listened for a long time, heard Betty's voice several times — but he was not interested in Betty.

There was Johnnie now! He tuned out everything else and listened. He was in the big house all right. Hey! Johnnie sounded just the way he did when he had arguments with his mother. Lummox spread his hearing a little and tried to find out what was going on.

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They were talking about things he knew nothing about. But one thing was clear: somebody was being mean to Johnnie. His mother? Yes, he heard her once — and he knew that she had the privilege of being mean to Johnnie, just as Johnnie could talk mean to him and it didn't really matter. But there was somebody else — several others, and not a one of them had any such privilege.

Lummox decided that it was time to act.

John Thomas got no farther in his peroration than "The poor thing —". There were screams and shouts from outside; everybody in court turned to look. The noises got rapidly closer and Mr. Greenberg was just going to send the bailiff to find out about it when suddenly it became unnecessary. The door to the court room bulged, then burst off its hinges. The front end of Lummox came in, tearing away part of the wall, and ending with him wearing the door frame as a collar. He opened his mouth. "Johnnie!" he piped.

"Lummox!" cried his friend. "Stand still. Stay right where you are. Don't move an inch!"

Of all the faces in the room, that of Special Commissioner Greenberg presented the most interesting mixed expression.

V

The Right Honorable Mr. Kiku, Under Secretary for Spatial Affairs, opened a desk drawer and looked over his collection of pills. There was no longer any doubt; his stomach ulcer was acting up again. He selected one and turned wearily back to his tasks.

He read an order from the departmental Bureau of Engineering grounding all *Pelican*-class interplanetary ships until certain modifications were accomplished. Mr. Kiku did not bother to study the attached engineering report, but signed approval, checked "EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY" and dropped the papers in the outgoing basket. Engineering safety in space was the responsibility of BuEng; Kiku himself knew nothing of engineering and did not wish to; he would back up the decisions of his chief engineer, or fire him and get another one.

But he realized glumly that the financial lords who owned the *Pelican*-class ships would soon be knocking the ear of the Secretary — and shortly thereafter the Secretary, out of his depth and embarrassed by the political power wielded by those fine gentlemen, would dump them in Mr. Kiku's lap.

The next item was for his information only and had been routed to him because of standing orders that anything concerning the Secretary must

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reach his desk, no matter how routine. This item appeared routine and unimportant: according to the synopsis an organization calling itself "The Friends of Lummox" and headed by a Mrs. Beulah Murgatroyd was demanding an audience with the Secretary of Spatial Affairs; they were being shunted to the Special Assistant Secretary (Public Relations).

Mr. Kiku read no farther. Wes Robbins would kiss them to death and neither he nor the Secretary would be disturbed. He amused himself with the idea of punishing the Secretary by inflicting Mrs. Murgatroyd on him, but it was merely a passing fantasy; the Secretary's time must be reserved for really important cornerstone-layings, not wasted on crackpot societies. Any organization calling itself "The Friends of This or That" always consisted of some one with an axe to grind, plus the usual assortment of prominent custard heads and professional stuffed shirts. But such groups could be a nuisance — therefore never grant them the Danegeld they demanded.

He sent it to files and picked up a memorandum from BuEcon: a virus had got into the great yeast plant at St. Louis; the projection showed a possibility of protein shortage and more drastic rationing. Even starvation on Earth was of no direct interest to Mr. Kiku. But he stared thoughtfully while the slide rule in his head worked a few figures, then he called an assistant. "Wong, have you seen BuEcon Ayo428?"

"Uh, I believe so, boss. The St. Louis yeast thing?"

"Yes. What have you done about it?"

"Er, nothing. Not my pidgin, I believe."

"You believe, eh? Our out-stations are your business, aren't they? Look over your shipping schedules for the next eighteen months, correlate with Ayo428, and project. You may have to buy Australian sheep — and actually get them into our possession. We can't have our people going hungry because some moron in St. Louis dropped his socks in a yeast vat."

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Kiku turned back to work. He realized unhappily that he had been too brusque with Wong. His present frame of mind, he knew, was not Wong's fault, but that of Dr. Ftaeml.

No, not Ftaeml's fault — his own! He knew that he should not harbor race prejudice, not in *this* job. He was aware intellectually that he himself was relatively safe from the persecution that could arise from differences of skin and hair and facial contour for the one reason that weird creatures such as Dr. Ftaeml had made the differences between breeds of men seem less important.

Still, there it was — he hated Ftaeml's very shadow.

If the so-and-so would wear a turban, it would help . . . instead of walking around with those dirty snakes on his head wiggling like a can of

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worms. But oh no! the Rargyllians were proud of them. There was a suggestion in their manner that anyone without them was not quite human.

Come now! — Ftaeml was a decent chap. He made a note to invite Ftaeml to dinner, not put it off any longer. After all, he would make certain of deep-hypnotic preparation; the dinner need not be difficult. But his ulcer gave a fresh twinge at the thought.

Kiku did not hold it against the Rargyllian that he had dropped an impossible problem in the department's tired lap; impossible problems were routine. It was just — well, why didn't the monster get a haircut?

The vision of the Chesterfieldian Dr. Ftaeml with a shingle cut, his scalp all lumps and bumps, enabled Mr. Kiku to smile; he resumed work feeling better. The next item was a brief of a field report — oh yes! Sergei Greenberg. Good boy, Sergei. He was reaching for his pen to approve the recommendation even before he had finished reading it.

Instead of signing, he stared for almost half a second, then punched a button. "Files! Send up the full report of Mr. Greenberg's field job, the one he got back from a few days ago."

He had only time to dispose of half a dozen items when, seconds later, the delivery tube went *thwong!* and a tiny cylinder popped out on his desk. He stuck it into his reading machine and relaxed, with his right thumb resting on a pressure plate to control the speed with which the print fled across the screen.

In less than seven minutes he had zipped through not only a full transcript of the trial but also Greenberg's report of all else that had happened. Mr. Kiku could read at least 2000 words a minute with the aid of a machine; oral recordings and personal interviews he regarded as time wasters. But when the machine clicked off he decided on an oral report. He leaned to his interoffice communicator and flipped a switch. "Greenberg."

Greenberg looked up from his desk. "Howdy, boss."

"Come here, please."

Greenberg decided that the bossman's stomach must be bothering him again. But it was too late to find some urgent business outside the departmental building; he hurried upstairs and reported with his usual cheery grin. "Howdy, Chief."

"Morning. I've been reading your intervention report."

"So?"

"How old are you, Greenberg?"

"Eh? Thirty-seven."

"Hmm. What is your present rank?"

"Sir? Diplomatic officer second class — acting first."

"Old enough to have sense," Kiku mused. "Rank enough to be assigned

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as ambassador — or executive deputy to a politically appointed ambassador. Sergei, how come you are so confounded stupid?"

Greenberg's jaw muscles clamped but he said nothing.

"Well?"

"Sir," Greenberg answered icily, "you are older and more experienced than I am. May I ask why you are so confounded rude?"

Mr. Kiku's mouth twitched but he did not smile. "A fair question. My psychiatrist tells me that it is because I am an anarchist in the wrong job. Now sit down and we'll discuss why you are so thick-headed. Cigarettes in the chair arm." Greenberg sat down, discovered that he did not have a light, and asked for one.

"I don't smoke," answered Kiku. "I thought those were the self-striking kind. Aren't they?"

"Oh. So they are." Greenberg lit up.

"See? You don't use your eyes and ears. Sergei, once that beast talked, you should have postponed the hearing until we knew all about him."

"Mmmm . . . I suppose so."

"You *suppose* so! Son, your subconscious alarms should have been clanging like a bed alarm on Monday morning. As it is, you let the implications be sprung on you when you thought the trial was over. And by a girl, a mere child. I'm glad I don't read the papers; I'll bet they had fun."

Greenberg blushed. He did read the papers.

"Then when she had you tangled up like a rangtangtoo trying to find its own feet, instead of facing her challenge and meeting it — Meeting it how? By adjourning, of course, and ordering the investigation you should have ordered to start with, you —"

"But I *did* order it."

"Don't interrupt me; I want you browned on both sides. Then you proceeded to hand down a decision the like of which has not been seen since Solomon ordered the baby sawed in half. What mail-order law school did you attend?"

"Harvard," Greenberg answered sullenly.

"Hmm . . . Well, I shouldn't be too harsh on you; you're handicapped. But by the seventy-seven seven-sided gods of the Sarvanchil, what did you do next? First you deny a petition from the local government itself to destroy this brute in the interest of public safety — then you reverse yourself, grant the prayer and tell them to kill him . . . subject only to routine approval of this department. All in ten minutes. Son, I don't mind you making a fool of yourself, but must you include the department?"

"Boss," Greenberg said humbly, "I made a mistake. When I saw the mistake, I did the only thing I could do; I reversed myself. The beast

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really is dangerous. You didn't see that solid wall bulge in. You didn't see the destruction."

"I'm not impressed. Did you ever see a city that had been flattened by a fusion bomb? What does one courthouse wall matter? Probably some thieving contractor didn't beef it up."

"But, boss, you should have seen the cage he broke out of first. Steel I-beams, welded. He tore them like straw."

"I recall that you inspected him in that cage. Why didn't you see to it that he was confined so that he couldn't get out?"

"Huh? Why, it's no business of the department to provide jails."

"Son, a factor concerning in any way anything from 'Out There' is the very personal business of this department. You know that. Once you know it awake and asleep, clear down to your toes, you'll begin to be a DepSpace man. You were supposed to be there with your nose twitching and your ears quivering, on the lookout for 'special situations.' You flubbed. Now tell me about this beast. I read the report, I saw his picture. But I don't *feel* him."

"Well, it's a non-balancing multipedal type, eight legs and about seven feet high at the dorsal ridge. It's —"

Kiku sat up straight. "Eight legs? Hands?"

"Hands? No."

"Manipulative organs of any sort? A modified foot?"

"None, chief — if there had been, I would have ordered a full-scale investigation at once. The feet are about the size of nail kegs, and as dainty. Why?"

"Never mind. Another matter. Go on."

"The impression is something like a rhinoceros, something like a triceratops, though the articulation is unlike anything native to this planet. 'Lummox' his young master calls him and the name fits. It's a rather engaging beast, but stupid. That's the danger; it's so big and powerful that it is likely to hurt people through clumsiness and stupidity. It does talk, but about as well as a four-year-old child — in fact it sounds as if it had swallowed a baby girl."

"Why stupid? I note that its master with the history-book name claims that it is bright."

Greenberg smiled. "He is prejudiced. I talked with it, boss. It's stupid."

"I can't see that you have established that. Assuming that an e.-t. is stupid because he can't speak our language well is like assuming that an Italian is illiterate because he speaks broken English."

"But look, boss, no *hands*. Maximum intelligence lower than monkeys. Maybe as high as a dog. Though not likely."

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"Well, I'll concede that you are orthodox in xenological theory, but that is all. Some day that assumption is going to rise up and slap the classic xenists in the face. We'll find a civilization that doesn't need to pick at things with patty-paws."

"Want to bet?"

"No. Where is this 'Lummox' now?"

Greenberg looked flustered. "Boss, this report I am about to make is now in the microfilm lab. It should be on your desk any minute."

"Okay, so you were on the ball — this time. Let's have it."

"I got chummy with the local judge and asked him to keep me advised. Of course they did not have anything strong enough to hold him — so they had learned, the hard way. And nothing could be built in a hurry that would be strong enough — believe me, that cage he crushed out of was *strong*. But the local police chief got a brain storm; they had an empty reservoir with sides about thirty feet high, reinforced concrete — part of their fire system. So they built a ramp and herded him down into it, then removed the ramp. It looked like a good dodge; the creature isn't built for jumping."

"Sounds okay."

"Yes, but that isn't all. Judge O'Farrell told me that the chief of police was so jittery that he decided not to wait for departmental okay; he went ahead with the execution."

"*What?*"

"Let me finish. He did not tell anybody — but accidentally-on-purpose the intake valve was opened that night and the reservoir filled up. In the morning there was Lummox, on the bottom."

"So?"

"It did not bother Lummox at all. He had been under water several hours, but when the water drained off, he woke up, stood up, and said, 'Good morning.' "

"Amphibious, probably. What steps have you taken to put a stop to this high-handedness?"

"Just a second, sir. Dreiser knew that firearms and explosives were useless — you saw the transcript. So he tried poison. Knowing nothing about the creature, he used half a dozen sorts in quantities sufficient for a regiment and concealed in several kinds of food."

"Well?"

"Lummox gobbled them all. They didn't even make him sleepy; in fact they seemed to stimulate his appetite, for the next thing he did was to eat the intake valve and the reservoir started to fill up again. They had to shut it off from the pumping station."

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Kiku snickered. "I'm beginning to like this Lummox. Did you say he *ate* the valve? What was it made of?"

"I don't know. The usual alloy, I suppose."

"Hmm . . . seems to like a bit of roughage in its diet. Perhaps it has a craw like a bird."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"What did the Chief do next?"

"Nothing as yet. I asked O'Farrell to impress on Dreiser that he was likely to end up in a penal colony thirty light-years from Westville if he persisted in bucking the department. So he is waiting and trying to figure out his problem. His latest notion is to cast Lummox in concrete and let him die at his own convenience. But O'Farrell put the nix on that one — inhumane."

"So Lummox is still in the reservoir, waiting for us to act, eh?"

"I believe so, sir. He was yesterday."

"Well, he can wait there, I suppose, until other action can be taken." Mr. Kiku picked up Greenberg's short-form report and recommendation.

Greenberg said, "I take it that you are overruling me, sir?"

"No. What gave you that idea?" He signed the order permitting the destruction of Lummox and let it be swallowed by the outgoing basket. "I don't reverse a man's decisions without firing him — and I have another job for you."

"Oh." Greenberg felt a twinge of compassion; he had been expecting, with relief, that the chief would reprieve Lummox's death sentence.

Mr. Kiku went on, "Are you afraid of snakes?"

"No. I rather like them."

"Excellent! Though it's a feeling I can't imagine. Once when I was a boy in Africa — never mind. Have you ever worked closely with Rargyllians? I don't recall."

Greenberg suddenly understood. "I used a Rargyllian interpreter in the Vega-VI affair. I get along all right with Rargyllians."

"I wish I did. Sergei, I have some business which involves a Rargyllian interpreter, a Dr. Ftaeml. You may have heard of him."

"Yes, of course, sir."

"I'll admit that, as Rargyllians go —" He made the noun sound like a swear word. "— Ftaeml is all right. But this involvement has the odor of trouble . . . and I find my own nose for trouble blanked out by this phobia of mine. So I'm putting you on as my assistant to sniff for me."

"Yes, sir. May I ask the nature of the assignment?"

"Well —" Before Mr. Kiku could answer, his secretary's light flashed and her voice stated, "Your hypnotherapist is here, sir."

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The Under Secretary glanced at his clock and said, "Where does the time go?" — then to the communicator: "Put him in my dressing room. I'll be in." He continued to Greenberg, "Ftaeml will be here in thirty minutes. I can't stop to talk; I've got to get braced for it. You'll find what there is — little enough! — in my 'pending-urgent' file." Mr. Kiku glanced at his incoming basket, which had filled to overflowing while they talked. "It won't take five minutes. Spend the rest of the time clearing up that stack of waste paper. Sign my name and hold anything that you think I must see — but it had better be no more than half a dozen items, or I'll send you back to Harvard!"

He got up hurriedly, while making a mental note to tell his secretary, from his dressing room, to note everything that went through in the next half hour and let him see it later . . . he wanted to see how the lad worked. Mr. Kiku was aware that he would die someday and he intended to see to it that Greenberg replaced him. In the meantime life should be as tough for the boy as possible.

The Under Secretary headed for his dressing room, the door ducked aside, contracted behind him; Greenberg was left alone. He was reaching for the pending-urgent file when a paper dropped into the incoming basket just as the light on it blinked red and a buzzer sounded.

He picked up the paper, ran his eye down the middle and had just realized that it really was urgent when a similar light-and-buzzer combination showed at the interoffice communicator and its screen came to life; Greenberg recognized the chief of the bureau of system liaison. "Boss?" the image said excitedly.

Greenberg touched the two-way switch. "Greenberg here," he answered. "I'm keeping the chief's chair warm for him. Your memo just came in."

Ibáñez looked annoyed. "Never mind that. Get me the boss."

Greenberg hesitated. Ibáñez's problem was simple, but sticky. Ships from Venus were regularly granted pratique without delay, each ship's doctor being a public health deputy. But the *Ariel*, already due at Port Libya, had suddenly been placed under quarantine by her doctor and was now waiting in a parking orbit. The Venerian foreign minister was aboard — most unfortunately, as Venus was expected to support Terra's position against Mars in the impending triangular conference.

Greenberg could stall the touchy problem until the boss was free; he could break in on the boss; he could go over the boss's head to the Secretary himself (which meant picking an answer and presenting it so as to get that answer approved); or . . . he could act, using Mr. Kiku's authority.

Greenberg's summing up had been quick. He answered, "Sorry, Stan, you can't talk to the boss. I am acting for him."

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Ibáñez frowned. "Look, chum, you had better find the boss. Maybe you are signing his name on routine matters — but this is not routine. We've got to bring that ship down in a hurry. Your neck would be out a yard if you took it upon yourself to authorize me to overlook a basic rule like quarantine."

Break quarantine? Greenberg recalled the Great Plague of '51, back in the days when the biologists serenely believed that each planetary life group was immune to the ills of other planets. "We won't break quarantine."

Ibáñez looked pained. "Sergei, we can't jeopardize this conference — 'jeopardize'? What am I saying? We can't toss away ten years' work because some crewman has a slight fever. The quarantine *must* be broken. But I don't expect you to do it."

Greenberg hesitated. "He's under hypnosis, for a tough job coming up. It may be a couple of hours before you can see him."

Ibáñez looked blank. "I'll have to tackle the Secretary. I don't dare wait two hours. That sacred cow from Venus is like as not to order his skipper to head home — we can't risk that."

"And we can't risk bringing in an epidemic either. Here's what you do. Call him and tell him you are coming to get him, in person. Use a fast scout. Get him aboard and leave the *Ariel* in quarantine orbit. Once you get him aboard the scout — and not before — tell him that both you and he will attend the conference in isolation suits." The isolation suit was a sealed pressure suit; its primary use was to visit planets whose disease hazards had not yet been learned. "The scout ship and crew will have to go into quarantine, too, of course."

"Isolation suit! Oh, he'll love that. Sergei, it would be less damaging to call off the conference. The jerk is poisonously proud."

"Sure he'll love it," Greenberg explained, "once you suggest how to play it. 'Great personal self-sacrifice' . . . 'unwilling to risk the welfare of our beloved sister planet' . . . 'the call of duty takes precedence over any et cetera.' If you don't feel sure of it, take one of the public relations boys along. And look, all through the conference he must be attended by a physician — in a white suit — and a couple of nurses. The conference must stop every now and then while he rests — put a cot and hospital screens in the Hall of Heroes near the conference table. The idea is that he's come down with it himself but is carrying on as his dying act. Get it? Tell him before you land the scout ship — indirectly, of course."

Ibáñez looked perturbed. "Do you think that will work?"

"It's up to you to make it work."

"Well . . . all right." Ibáñez suddenly grinned. "I'm on my way." He switched off.

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Greenberg turned back to the desk, feeling exhilarated by the sensation of playing God. He wondered what the boss would have done? — but did not care. There might be many correct solutions, but this was one; it felt right. He reached again for the pending-urgent file.

He stopped. Something was gnawing at the back of his mind. The boss had not wanted to approve that death sentence; he had felt it. Shucks, the boss had *told* him that he was wrong; the proper action was a full investigation. But the boss, as a matter of loyalty to his subordinates, had not reversed him.

But he himself was sitting in the boss's chair at the moment. Well?

Was that why the boss had placed him there? To let him correct his own mistake? No, the boss was subtle but not omniscient; he could not have predicted that Greenberg would consider reopening the matter.

Still — He called the boss's private secretary. "Mildred?"

"Yes, Mr. Greenberg?"

"That brief-and-rec on that intervention I carried out — Rto411, it was. It went out fifteen minutes ago. I want it back. If the order has left the building, send a cancellation and a more-to-follow, will you? And get the original document back to me."

Finally he got to the pending-urgent file. As Mr. Kiku had said, the jacket marked "Ftaeml" was not large. He found it subtitled: "Beauty & the Beast" and wondered why. The boss had a sense of humor — but it veered so much that other people had a hard time following it.

Presently his eyebrows lifted. Those tireless interpreters, brokers, go-betweens, and expounders, the Rargyllians, were always popping up in negotiations between diverse races; the presence of Dr. Ftaeml on Earth had tipped Greenberg that something was up with a non-humanoid people . . . non-human in mentality, creatures so different psychologically that communication was difficult. But he had not expected the learned doctor was representing a race that he had never heard of . . . something termed "the *Hroshii*."

It was possible that Greenberg had simply forgotten these people with a name like a sneeze; they might be some unimportant breed, at a low cultural level, or economically inconsequential, or not possessing space travel. Or they might have been brought into the Community of Civilizations while Greenberg had been up to his ears in Solar System affairs. Once the human race had made contact with other races having interstellar travel the additions to the family of legal "humans" had come so fast that a man could hardly keep up.

Or perhaps he knew of the Hroshii under another name? Greenberg turned to Mr. Kiku's universal dictionary and keyed in the name.

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The machine considered it, then the reading plate flashed: NO INFORMATION.

Greenberg tried dropping the aspirate on the assumption that the word might have degenerated in the mouths of non-Hroshii — still the same negative.

He dropped the matter. The universal dictionary in the British Museum was not more knowledgeable than the one in the Under Secretary's office; its working parts occupied an entire building in another part of Capital, and a staff of cyberneticists, semanticians, and encyclopedists endlessly fed its hunger for facts. He could be sure that, whatever the "Hroshii" were, the Federation had never heard of them before.

Which was astounding.

Having let astonishment persist a full second Greenberg went on reading. He learned that the Hroshii were already here, not landed on Earth but in a parking orbit fifty thousand miles out. He read on to discover that the reason he had not heard of their advent was that Dr. Ftaeml had urgently advised Mr. Kiku to keep patrol ships and such from challenging and attempting to board the stranger.

He was interrupted by the return of his report on the Lummox matter, bearing Mr. Kiku's confirmation of the sentence. He thought for a moment, then added to the endorsement so that it read: "Recommendation approved — but this action is not to be carried out until after a complete scientific analysis of this creature has been made. Local authorities will surrender custody when required to the Bureau of Xenic Science, which will arrange transportation and select the agency to pursue the evaluation."

Greenberg signed Kiku's name to the change and put it back into the system. He admitted sheepishly that the order was now weasel-worded — for it was a sure thing that once the xenobiologists got their hands on Lummox they would never let him go. Nevertheless his heart felt suddenly lighter. The other action was wrong; this one was *right.*

He turned his attention back to the Hroshii — and again his eyebrows went up. The Hroshii were not here to establish relations with Earth; they were here to rescue one of their own. According to Dr. Ftaeml, they were convinced that Terra was holding this Hroshia and were demanding that she be surrendered.

Greenberg felt as if he had blundered into a bad melodrama. These people with the asthmatic name had picked the wrong planet for cops-and-robbers nonsense. A non-human on Earth without a passport, without a dossier in the hands of the department, without an approved reason for visiting Earth, would be as helpless as a bride without a ration book.

Besides, how did they figure she had reached the surface of Earth? Star

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ships did not land; they were served by shuttles. He could just see her tackling the purser of one of those shuttles: "Excuse me, sir, but I am fleeing from my husband in a distant part of the Galaxy. Do you mind if I hide under this seat and sneak down to your planet?"

Something was niggling at him — then he remembered the boss's inquiry: did Lummox have hands? He realized that the boss must have been wondering whether Lummox could be the missing Hroshia, since Hroshii, according to Ftaeml, had eight legs. Greenberg chuckled. Lummox was not the boy to build and operate star ships, not he nor any of his cousins.

The real question was what to do with the Hroshii now they were in contact with them. Anything from "Out There" was interesting, educational, and profitable to mankind, once it was analyzed — and a race that had its own interstellar drive was sure to be all of that, squared and cubed. No doubt the boss was kidding them along while developing permanent relations. Very well, it was up to Greenberg to foster that angle.

Mr. Kiku announced himself by looking over his shoulder and saying, "That basket is as full as ever."

"Oh. Howdy, boss. Yes, but think of the shape it would have been in if I hadn't torn up every second item without reading it."

Mr. Kiku glanced at the clock. "No word from our friend with the animated hair?"

"Not yet." Greenberg told about the quarantine for the *Ariel* and what he had done. Mr. Kiku nodded, which was equivalent to a citation in front of the regiment in some circles; Greenberg felt a warm glow and went on to tell about the revision in the order for Lummox.

Mr. Kiku nodded. He considered telling Greenberg that it had saved him thinking up a face-saving way of accomplishing the same end, but decided not to. Instead he leaned to his desk. "Mildred? Heard anything from Dr. Ftaeml?"

"Just arrived, sir."

"Good. East conference room, please." He switched off and turned to Greenberg. "Well, son, now for some snake charming. Got your flute with you?"

TO BE CONTINUED

Next month, Fantasy and Science Fiction will bring you the second exciting installment of Star Lummox. *Don't miss this suspenseful sequence in which the strange visitors from another planet present the world with an impossible request — a request that cannot be fulfilled, and that threatens the Intergalactic government with complete destruction!*

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We've long admired Margot Bennett for her mystery novels, which combine intricate formal puzzles with sharp wit and shrewd insight into character. (The latest published in this country was THE WIDOW OF BATH; *the more recent* FAREWELL CROWN AND GOOD-BYE KING *has so far appeared only in England.) But those astute studies in criminal reality, admirable as they are, would never prepare you for such an attractive specimen of soberly related topsy-turviness as this tale of one of the maddest Mad Scientists in literature.*

An Old-Fashioned Poker for My Uncle's Head

by MARGOT BENNETT

As FAR BACK as I can remember, my Uncle Alfred, the inventor, lived with us, but it was many years before he spoke to me. His tastes were strangely quiet. He slept until 12, then breakfasted slowly in bed. He rose about 2, and walked in the garden, looking at the flowers. If there were no flowers he looked at the weeds, and if it was raining he played the piano with one finger. At 4 he came to the table and had a large tea, silently, before going back to bed.

"He has outgrown his brilliance," was the only explanation my mother ever gave.

After several years of this behaviour, I naturally expected it to go on for ever. It was a shock to all of us when the change came. He walked downstairs one afternoon, dressed, as usual, for the garden. Heavy rain was falling. He turned to the piano. For the first time in ten years it was being tuned. I suppose it was despair that drove him across the room to the bookshelves. With a taut smile he shut his eyes, pulled out a book, and went back to his bedroom.

"What was it?" my mother asked, trembling.

"It was *The Childhood of Famous Scientists*," I said, and burst into tears.

We all saw that nothing could be the same again, but we were surprised to find that everything was not only different from what it had been before,

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it kept on being different every day. At first he read books in bed, then he went out and read books in the public library. Within six months the old Uncle Alfred had vanished. Instead we had a disturbingly brisk man, who rose at 5:30, worked until 8, snatched a cup of tea, read for three hours, ran round the park, and came back to work. We didn't know what his work was, but it kept him up after midnight.

One evening my mother had a fancy to use the bronze candlestick she had been given as a wedding present. She thought we would enjoy talking by candlelight, although in our family we had the habit of silence. We were sitting quietly and a little unhappily round the bronze candlestick when my uncle came in, and the novelty of the scene caught his eye.

"I'll think about that, Susan," he said with a strange smile. "I'm sure we can improve on that."

Later he came down with a water bottle in his hand.

"I've torn my shirt up," he said, "but I don't know if I've got it right. Call your husband, Susan!"

My father came, and Uncle Alfred, looking stern and exhausted — I remember his face made me think of *Wuthering Heights* — tore another strip from the fragments of shirt he carried, and dropped one end into the water bottle. Then he struck a match and lit the shirt. It smouldered uncertainly, then burst into illuminated smoke. Uncle Alfred had invented the oil lamp.

My mother was deeply impressed, but my father quietly turned on the electric light and left the room.

My uncle did not seem crestfallen. The room reeked with oil and smoke, so he left it.

The lamp was only the first of his inventions. After that we had something new every day. They all seemed to happen just the way I'd been told. I mean, he didn't think of the steam engine until he had spent hours in the kitchen, watching the kettle boil. After the steam engine came the telescope, the camera, the paddle-steamer, and several devices we did not fully understand. He worked hard, wiring our house for the first telephone, and I think he was really proud when he sang "Annie Laurie" to me over his instrument, and I heard it on the receiver, which was a little like a French horn. It was this invention that brought out the worldly streak in his nature.

"I think I'll have to get some of my little things patented," he said, and pointed rather angrily to the telephone. "I saw one of these yesterday. Other people are beginning to steal my ideas."

Our house was by now full of coils of wire and black smoke, and my

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father became increasingly irritable. He took my mother and me to the pictures several evenings a week, although we all disliked pictures. I think Uncle Alfred frightened him.

There was one night when he frightened even my mother. We came back from the pictures to see flames gushing from the upper windows. My father, moaning, ran into the house, my mother fainted, and I went to telephone the fire brigade. By the time they came the fire was almost out, my father and Uncle Alfred were scorched, but not seriously, and my mother was drinking brandy.

"What was it, Robert?" she asked, blue-lipped.

"Your brother has just invented incandescent gas," he told her gently. He took the brandy from her. "We'll have to stop this!" he shouted.

My Uncle Alfred seemed interested in the horseless carriage, when he thought of it, but he was delighted with moving pictures. "There's a future in this, Susan," he said. "People will pay to see this, one day." He was writing his inventions out, by now, and giving them to my father to file with the Patent Office. My father destroyed them at once. Father by now hated Uncle Alfred so much that he was reluctant to admit he had a certain talent.

The gramophone was one of the few inventions that my uncle by-passed. But one night when we were playing some military marches, he came in and listened intently for a few minutes. "I think it would be quite possible to construct two-sided records," he said quietly. I mention this only to show that his brilliance could be quite spontaneous.

When electric light and the radio were invented my father's hatred was submerged in fear. "He's catching up, Susan," he muttered to my mother. "Now we really have got to stop him."

But my mother wouldn't listen. Even when Uncle Alfred was found in the garden, cranking up a small aeroplane, she wouldn't listen to my father.

"This is going to change a lot of things," my uncle said. He finished cranking the aeroplane and jumped clear. It went off with a shriek, tore upwards, almost vertically, and shot like a shell through the roof, which it practically demolished. It burst into flames; my mother fainted, and I had to run to telephone the fire brigade. They saved most of the house.

My father drank some of the first-aid brandy, and talked wildly of having uncle certified, but my mother, when she came to, pointed out that no one else had been locked up for inventing aeroplanes. My father's shouts died down and he let himself be led to his charred and sodden bedroom.

The next thing my uncle invented was the talking picture, and that did surprise us, for this was back in the twenties, the year before the first talking picture was produced. Uncle Alfred had caught up.

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My uncle produced Technicolour and television, but he seemed abstracted, and as we had no previous information about either, we didn't know whether to be enthusiastic or not. My father burnt the plans out of habit.

After that we entered the explosive era, in which my father grew bald, emaciated, and abnormally nervous. My uncle naturally used very small quantities of everything, but at any time of the day or night our house was liable to be rocked by minor explosions, and the windows were always being broken. He talked a lot about the compulsion of defence, and gave my father plans for a mine that would blow up every ship for miles, and another for a ship that would blow up the mines. He also invented the pilotless bombing plane. How far away it all seems now!

One morning my uncle came into breakfast with a glitter in his usually dull eye. "I hope you didn't bother patenting these other inventions, Robert," he said to my father. "They're all obsolete, now."

My father put down his knife and fork. He always lost his appetite when Uncle Alfred appeared.

"I've got a bomb that splits the atom," my uncle said. "And once it starts, it's very doubtful if you can stop it. And do you know, I'm not going to bother patenting that either?"

Uncle Alfred gulped down some porridge. "Because I've got something better," he said as soon as his mouth was empty. "I hope you won't be offended," he said off-handedly, "if I register it at the Patent Office myself. I think I've stumbled on something big."

"And what do you mean to do with it?" my father asked fiercely.

"I'll let our own government know first. Then, if they agree, we'll let all the governments know. It's the only safe way."

"Yes," my father said. "I see that — Will you go out and buy me a back collar stud," he said to me rather strangely.

I went. When I came back my father was standing on the lawn, beside my mother, who had fainted. I was scarcely surprised to see that the house was on fire. I went almost automatically to telephone the fire brigade.

"I'm afraid they won't be able to save your poor Uncle Alfred this time," my father said complacently, drinking some of the brandy with which I was trying to revive mother.

They failed to save either my uncle or the house. I have often wondered since whether father was right. He was, in a way — I mean it did give us another fifteen years after all, but I do think it unfortunate that the marvellous last invention was burnt with uncle. What I mean is that it would be our country's very own secret. It probably would have meant peace forever.

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Those of you who have read Will Stanton's Barney (*in* THE BEST FROM F&SF: FIRST SERIES) *or his equally memorable* The Town Without a Straight Man (*in* THE QUEEN'S AWARDS: EIGHTH SERIES) *know that he has a wry, off-beat mind and a versatile prose style admirably capable of expressing any of that mind's odd ideas. Here Mr. Stanton, quietly and convincingly, looks at the post-atomic future and sets us thinking about man and his values.*

The Pioneer

by WILL STANTON

I GUESS WHAT I miss as much as anything is talking to people. I don't mean speeches or debates, but what we used to call visiting. They tell me now it isn't socially progressive. I always figured "social" to mean that a few people would sit around and enjoy themselves, but now it means everybody acting glum and doing what they don't want, for the good of the community. I don't know that I'll ever get the hang of it.

Even the kids. I noticed a bunch of them in the recreation grounds the other day playing some game they called civics. As near as I could make out, one of them would make a resolution and then the rest would vote on it and write it down in a book. After a while I asked them if they never did anything a little more lively, like turning somersaults. They'd never even heard of it.

So I showed them how and they all tried it, and then one of them, I think he was the chairman, he said, "Why do you do it?"

"Well," I said, "I'm sorry I interrupted you, you'd better go back to your game." When I got to the corner I turned to look back and they were sitting down again passing more resolutions. All except one of them, a little towheaded kid, and he was turning somersaults one after the other as fast as he could, and a little girl, the secretary I believe she was, she was peeking around watching him. So it may be things haven't changed altogether, but only on the outside.

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Here a while ago there was this banquet on my birthday and they were all for having me make a speech about the old days — what it was like and all. But I couldn't do that, and thanks all the same was what I told them. Because I was never any hand at speaking and besides it all happened too long ago and there's been too many changes. It's like it was a different world in those days and there's no way to explain it.

Back when I was going to school, I must of gone to about a dozen different ones by the time I was seventeen. I'd stay with one set of relatives until they could talk some other family into taking me and so on like that. The last school was in Sacramento, California — I was in the freshman class and I didn't like it.

For one thing the seats were too small and I never could seem to get comfortable and then the teachers would say I wasn't paying attention. Especially one of them. I told her finally she better stop picking on me and she lied and said she liked me as much as any of the students. So then I told her she was wasting her time because I didn't like her and never would. Well, after two years in her class you wouldn't of thought that would be any surprise but it turned into quite a row. Then she went to get the principal and I left my books right where they were and got my cap and walked out and never went back.

And that's where my education really started because going across the country with Glenn and the Champ I learned more than if I'd stayed on in school another ten years.

I went home and packed my things in an old valise that I had. My uncle asked me if I was leaving and I said yes and he gave me half a dollar. I think if I'd of held out he would have made it more. Anyway I walked out as far as the highway and pretty soon this big open car stopped with two men in it.

They asked me where I was going and I said I hadn't made up my mind yet. That started both of them to laughing because they couldn't decide either. Glenn, the one that was driving, wanted to hit up to the north, and the other fellow, Champ, he wanted to go south and they argued for about 200 miles, heading east.

"Up north now," Glenn said, "we'd get in most of the fishing and hunting season and then the winter sports."

"You can't beat the gulf for fishing," Champ told him, "and besides there's swimming and golf and the races or you could just lay around on the sand and watch the pretty girls. Think of all the broken hearts down there if we don't show up."

They kept going like that with all kinds of crazy remarks until you couldn't keep a straight face if you wanted to. They even asked me what I thought about it. Well, I could swim pretty good, but I'd never done any of

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the other things so I wasn't able to help them out any. By then it was getting dark so Glenn pulled up to a big roadhouse and said he guessed it was time to eat. I told them I'd had a big meal just before they picked me up, so I'd stay in the car and watch their things.

Champ just grinned and held the door open so there wasn't anything I could do but go on in with them. The manager gave me kind of a fishy look — I had on my old sweater and corduroy pants — but Glenn pushed right by him and we all sat down to a table and they bought me a big steak supper.

Afterwards they took turns at the wheel, and finally Glenn asked if I could handle a car. I didn't have any license, but I'd driven quite a few times, so they let me try it and I got along fine. About 2 A.M. we pulled into a state park and stopped the car. They both had sleeping bags and there was some extra blankets in back. It was a warm night. We talked for a while, and one of them offered me a cigarette.

It gave me kind of a funny feeling, laying there smoking and looking at the stars when I came to think that just that morning I'd been sitting in a freshman arithmetic class 500 miles away. I figured by the next day I'd be on my own again, but all the same, meeting up with Glenn and Champ had been about the finest thing that had ever happened to me. Of course you've got to remember that I wasn't but seventeen years old, and I'd never had anybody to look up to before.

We got an early start in the morning, and every town we came to I half expected they'd drop me off, but the subject never came up. They got going again on whether to head north or south and argued about it all the way to Denver. That's where the money ran out and we had to stop. I hadn't given any thought before to what business they were in, and it turned out Champ was a waiter by trade and Glenn was a cook's assistant.

It made me feel kind of blue thinking of all the money they'd spent on me when they were broke themselves, but they told me to forget it, they'd get jobs without any trouble and they did too, that same afternoon. That evening we got a room that would sleep three. Champ talked the landlady into trusting us for the rent, but she made him hand over the keys to the car until we'd paid up. As a matter of fact, Glenn had an extra set of keys so we could of used the car if we'd had to in case of emergency.

The next morning when the two of them had gone off to work, I straightened up the room in good shape and went off to look for a job. I'd never done anything except around the house, so I walked out to a pretty good residential section and started knocking on back doors. The first fifteen or twenty places there was nothing doing, but then some lady had some furniture to paint and another one said I could clean wallpaper if I came back next day and after that I had all the jobs I could handle.

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I never made any fortune out of it, but I could pay my share of expenses and have money left and you couldn't ask for no more than that. Champ and Glenn ate at the restaurant where they worked and a lot of times at night they'd bring something home — half a pie or a chicken nobody had ordered, so that way we were able to live real good and save money too.

When I had enough put aside, I bought a fishing reel for Glenn and a second-hand pair of binoculars for Champ. I left them on the dresser so they'd see them when they came home from work. Well, they were surprised all right. "What's this all about?" Champ asked as they unwrapped the gifts.

And Glenn said, "Say, this is really something." He was turning the reel over and over in his hands.

"I just happened to see them in a store window," I said, "and thought you might like them." They said they liked them fine.

We stayed on there for about six weeks. Then one night Glenn and I turned in early — Champ was out with some girl — and about 3 A.M. he came in and switched on the light. He was all scratched up and his clothes were muddy and torn. He limped over to the washstand and began cleaning up.

Glenn got out of bed and began throwing things into a suitcase. "Come on, kid," he said to me, "get your stuff packed."

"Let him make up his own mind," Champ said. "He's got a little business built up here, he don't have to clear out unless he wants to."

"What's the matter with you?" Glenn asked him. "The kid's one of us, isn't he? Don't talk foolish."

The way he spoke up gave me kind of a good feeling and I went right on packing my bag and kept my mouth shut. I couldn't of said anything if I'd wanted to. In about ten minutes we had everything in the car and got going. Glenn shoved the accelerator right down to the floor.

"You can take it easy," Champ told him. "The cops aren't in on this — just a personal matter." We slowed down. "It's a nice town," Champ went on, "but it's got too many hills in it. Take this place I went tonight. There was only two steps going up to the front door, but around back under the windows there was a fifteen-foot drop."

Glenn started in to laughing so hard I had to grab the wheel. "You ought to of known better," he said finally.

"I know better now," Champ said. But that's the way it was with us restaurant workers in those days — come and go as you please, and not take things so serious, the way it is now. . . .

Like a while back I went down to sign up for my Diet and Lodging allowance and there was a new girl there. She looked up my records and it

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amazed her when she found out I'd never completed my indoctrination courses. "You ought to be setting an example," she said, "a man your age. If you don't do something about it pretty soon they may only let you have half a vote."

I told her as far as I could see there was never more than half a man to vote for. She didn't see anything funny in it, but I guess most people are that way now. They tune in the Humor Hour every evening and that's the end of it and a lot of them don't even do that. They get a permit not to listen and do something else. In the old days we used to be laughing and joking all the time. . . .

Well, after Denver, the next time we stopped was Cola Springs resort on the gulf and we all got a job in the same place. Champ being a top-notch waiter and Glenn a good kitchenman, they talked the man into taking me on as a dishwasher, although I'd never had any experience at it. But Glenn gave me some pointers and I picked up a few tricks myself, so it wasn't long before I got the hang of it and we stayed on there all winter. Sometimes when we had an afternoon off we'd go for a drive or lay around on the beach and every once and a while I'd get to thinking of the kids back in Sacramento that would probably be sitting in some history class and I'd cross my fingers and hope nothing would change my luck.

Saturday nights after work we'd get all shined up and go to a dance maybe, or a night club. I'd bought some new clothes by then and the way Champ and Glenn fixed themselves up nobody could of told but what we were rich folks from up north just come to town for the season. Not that we ever tried to pretend that we weren't restaurant workers, because in those days you wouldn't find a better class of men anywheres — more rough or ready or open-handed. We were making good money and we weren't afraid to spend it. Lots of times we'd be in some place with wealthy people all around and we'd be the heaviest tippers in the house.

There was some used to claim that the bus drivers had it all over us and I admit they made plenty of noise and swaggered around in their uniforms, but when it comes to A-1 free and easy living they were never in it with us. I remember one night they had a big blowout and a bunch of us restaurant workers got together and crashed the party. We hadn't been there but a few minutes when we were dancing with all the prettiest girls and of course that didn't set so good with the bus drivers. They got to talking it over and it may be that they'd eaten something that had made them overconfident, because they made up their minds they were going to throw us out.

Well, little incidents like that used to happen every so often and there wasn't any hard feelings connected to it, just high spirits was all it was.

I've always been grateful I enjoyed myself while I had the chance. I'd of

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been in bad shape if I'd have waited until now. This girl down to the Diet and Lodgings Office was telling me if I didn't try to be a better citizen I might lose some of my recreation privileges.

"Why, heck," I said to her, "I used up all my privileges before you was even a gleam in the Fertilization Committee's eye. When I was your age," I told her, "a year's worth of privileges wouldn't of lasted me past 11 o'clock on a Saturday night."

She give me a lecture on responsibility and so forth and asked if I didn't want to see a better world.

"I've already seen a better world than what you've got," I said, "and you won't get it back by voting for it."

It was in the spring when we left the gulf, so we headed north again, working our way through a lot of little towns, never staying long in one place. Everybody was feeling pretty good in those days, people in general I mean, not just us. For a long time they'd been worried about the war and being bombed and the like, but after a while they gave up worrying.

A couple of comedians had worked up a skit about it I remember. One of them made out like he was a scientist that had just discovered a new bomb, and the other fellow was a reporter. The reporter picked up this bomb that was about the size of a quart bottle and he wanted to know if it would wipe out an enemy city and the scientist said yes, it would. So the reporter said he guessed you'd have to drop it right in the middle of the enemy city and the scientist said no, you wouldn't. "You don't even have to drop it near the city," he said. "You could just drop it out the window over there." Naturally everybody got a big laugh out of that and I supposed they figured that if things had gone that far, there was no use to worry, and nobody did.

We took it easy that summer, working our way east, doing whatever we pleased and a little extra. Everything was wide open and you could walk right into a store and buy cigars and whisky. Not that I want to make any complaints about the way they're running things now. They've outlawed war and crime and such as that and they've got security and equality. I don't know that they've got as much equality as in the old days, but they've spread it around over more people.

We finally wound up at a resort about 60 miles from New York, up in the hills. Champ and Glenn had both been to the city before and they were always arguing about the best places to go once we got there. We had it planned to drive in as soon as we got paid, and do the town and if the manager didn't like it that would be his hard luck. We almost made it.

It was a Thursday evening just after dark and I was in the kitchen cleaning up when there was this flash I took to be heat lightning. Then the floor

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started to shake and a stack of dishes fell over, and all over the hotel people commenced to yell. I took off my apron and Champ stuck his head in the door and said, "Come on, kid. If you want to see New York you'd better hurry."

Glenn was waiting outside and the three of us started up toward Lookout Point — they called it Lover's Leap too and some other names that weren't very polite. We met a lot of folks running down the path and they were hollering all kinds of crazy things, but we didn't pay them much attention. There was some benches up on the point and we sat down to watch. The whole east was lighted up, but you couldn't make out any actual flames. More just a glare that would get brighter for a minute and then die out some. When we first got there the moon was full and clear but after a little it got hazy as the smoke commenced to drift across in front of it and a little while later all the sky to the east was covered with a bank of smoke and the underside was all pink and orange from the reflection.

Glenn had a gallon jug full of wine and we all had a couple of swallows. Then we lit up cigarettes and sat there and didn't say anything.

Pretty soon Champ reached down and took off his shoes. "I've been wanting to do that all day," he said.

"I used to soak my feet in hot salt water," said Glenn, "every night, but I never could see that it did any good. I've forgot who it was told me to do it."

"People will tell you all kinds of crazy things," Champ said. He took another drink out of the jug and passed it around. I just had a sip, I was feeling kind of lightheaded anyhow.

Glenn rested the jug on his knee and swirled it around sort of absent-minded. "They used to be a joke about New York," he said. "Folks would say with all the noise and accidents going on every day, if they ever did drop a bomb on it how were you going to tell the difference?"

"Yeah, I heard that one," Champ said. "I guess now they're finding out the difference." Then he called to mind some other joke he'd heard and Glenn told a few more and we sang a couple of songs and drank and talked and watched the city burn.

"Well, kid," Glenn said finally, "you come a long way from Sacramento."

"Yeah," I said. I didn't feel like talking about it. What I wanted was for us to throw our stuff in the car and take off — the way we left all the other towns. I wished everything could keep on being the same as it was.

Glenn nodded toward the fire. "Looks like it might take quite a while to get things straightened out again. They're going to need people like us restaurantmen — ones that maybe been in a little trouble before and don't get rattled easy. They'll need all of us."

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"May even have to call in the bus drivers," Champ said.

"Chances are," said Glenn and we left it at that. We hung around there until morning and the fire was as bright as ever. It would surprise you how long it takes a big city to burn but there wasn't any reason to stay any longer, so we walked back down the hill.

At this banquet for my birthday recently that I started to talk about, the speaker said a lot of nice things about me like how I was a pioneer and had gone through bitter experiences and we were all happy now to be living in better times. Of course, he meant that anybody that wasn't satisfied with the way things were run should look at this poor worthless old man and what a miserable life he'd had, and then they'd feel better. In a way there was a lot of truth in it because all the folks I ever cared about are long gone, and the places I lived are blown up and forgotten. The old life wasn't perfect and I don't know that anybody claimed it was. There was trouble enough for everybody and some to spare and worry and unhappiness of one kind and another. But if somebody was to come along now and give me a choice, I'd tell him I wouldn't want to live in no other time —I wouldn't of missed it for the world.

Prize Contest Results

In our recently concluded contest for letters from you naming the best stories we published in 1953, there was something surprisingly close to unanimity as to your first choice: J. T. McIntosh's One in Three Hundred. *(Note for the future: the third and last in this distinguished series of McIntosh novelets will appear in the August issue of F&SF.) The $100 check for first prize goes to Mr. McIntosh without any argument; but an extremely close battle developed for second and third places. By narrow margins, Poul Anderson carried off the $50 second prize for F&SF's first serial,* Three Hearts and Three Lions; *and Ward Moore won the $25 third prize for* Lot *(a sequel to which will appear here soon).*

Even harder than figuring the awards to authors was the problem of judging which were the best letters from readers. So many letters were well reasoned and clearly expressed that we regret we could select only three winners, who are: first prize ($100), Leo Traynor, 500th MISG, Transl, APO 613, % P.M., San Francisco, Calif.; second prize ($50), Mrs. Noreen Kane Falasca, 11610 Detroit Ave. #2, Cleveland 2, Ohio; third prize ($25), Sam Sackett, 1428½ S. Boudy Dr., Los Angeles 25, Calif.

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Dale Jennings is a Texan who does not love his native state and an advertising salesman who does love his profession, which he describes as "a glorious flowering of decadence that reminds me of the last days of the Roman Empire." Perhaps as insurance against the arrival of the Goths, he is now starting a side-career as a short story writer, and makes his debut with a straightforward little tale of pure terror which sounds as if, like Edward Lucas White's classics, it might be the direct transcription of a nightmare.

The Gingerbread Man

by DALE JENNINGS

BEFORE HE STEPPED down on the rubber pad that would open the door, he asked what time it was. The bus-driver held his big watch down at an angle to catch the light from the dashboard: "Exactly two minutes to 3. Your wife's gonna raise the roof."

"Nope, I'm coming home from work and I'm a real honest-to-gosh bachelor with nine cold blocks to walk to an empty room."

"Fella, if I was your age with your looks, I'd be glad to walk nine blocks without a family care in the world."

"Maybe, only maybe. Night."

He walked away from the bus and past the closed drug store. Beyond, it was very dark. These old streets were so crooked that no two street lights could be seen at the same time. It was an old residential section where big, private mansions had become rooming houses. The tiny night lights behind these cut-glass doors suggested nothing homelike. The gardens were pitch black and the wind made clear little noises with trees and scraps of paper. He stopped and turned away from the wind to light a cigarette. As he ducked his head toward the flame, he saw that he was being followed.

A police dog had just come to a stop back there half a block away. From what he could see, it was a big animal, lean and powerful. As he watched, it stood motionless looking up his way. When he turned to walk on, the dog started too. The bus pulled out of its wait at the end of the line and took with it the only other sign of life in the night.

The young man walked on, smoked and hummed to himself in time to

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the beat of his heels on the walk. Then his brows lifted at another sound. It was a quick pat-pat-pat and the faint whisper of claws on cement. He glanced over his shoulder. The big dog had halved the distance between them and was keeping pace about 50 feet back.

The young man tried an experiment. He stopped suddenly; the dog stopped. He started and the dog started with him. The young man smiled wryly, shrugged and quickened his pace.

During the next two blocks the animal again cut in two the distance between them.

Under the next street light, he stopped, faced the animal and whistled to it. He spoke reassuringly, then squatted with one hand held out. The big dog merely stood looking straight at him, not panting, not moving as it watched. Reflected light made flat, cold discs of its eyes.

The young man rose and, still talking softly, started toward the dog. A deep growl came out of the furry darkness. The man stopped and lowered his hand uncertainly. Those eyes hadn't left him an instant. The growl grew louder; he started backing up, then turned and went on quickly.

The sound of the claws on the cement became increasingly clear. The dog was only a few yards away now. The young man started to cross the street at the usual place. The dog was loping in the gutter now, and almost upon him.

He returned to the walk. He smiled too carelessly and urged the dog on: "Come on, boy! You'll have to run faster than that to catch an old track man. Hurry up or I might get away. 'Run, run, as fast as you can! You can't catch me! I'm the Gingerbread Man!' "

The dog had moved to the middle of the street. It was alongside him now. He had to cross here to go home. The animal stood directly in his path. He stopped and spoke softly, "What the *hell*. Are you going to keep me walking the streets all night? Look, boy, I live up that way. I don't mind you following me, but follow me *home*, dammit."

He started to go around the dog. Its body tensed, crouched to spring. Its growl told about dark night, cold hate and death.

Then a car was coming up the street and he was smiling at all his foolishness. He stood in the light and waved. The car slowed down to go around the dog. There were two people inside looking at him through the closed windows. He shouted, "This dog's — he's chasing me! I think he's mad!" They stared, looked at each other and roared away fast. He stood alone on the corner swearing after them.

"I wonder if I could go in one of these rooming houses and use the phone. But would the police give a damn? It does sound crazy. Oh, hell, this is just a dog. I'll find me a rock. They always run when you pick up something."

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But as he bent for a small rock, the animal began creeping toward him; it growled steadily. He backed away with his hands half-raised. He found himself shouting, "Help!" as loudly as he could. At the word, the dog sprang.

In an instant, normal fear became panic and he was running as fast as he could. The animal trotted behind him.

Now he was running in no particular direction, away from the beast.

Suddenly the animal was at his left elbow. He swerved to the right and ran up an alley. He could see nothing. The whole world was nothing but blackness. The night was a rasp of claws, a great panting beside him and that mounting growl.

The growl rose to the roaring snarl that comes with an animal's attack. Fangs closed on the right side of his coat. He jerked the other way, heard the cloth tear, staggered on. Again the weight of the animal thrust against him. The teeth closed on his arm. He wrenched away moaning, felt the teeth rake his arm and the sleeve peel open. He fell into another alleyway, ran down it, bumped from wall to wall.

Suddenly he was in a great open yard. There was a light, a good warm light in a doorway and a man was standing there. His friendly voice was calling out, "What's going on out here? Young fellow, are you in trouble?" Moaning with joy, the young man stumbled forward, threw himself at the light, fell on the floor beyond the man. The door closed just as the animal lunged one last time.

The big dog stopped, sniffed at the bottom of the door, then stood with ears perked high as it watched the shadows on the shade. Suddenly the lights snapped out and the house was in total darkness. The big dog turned, trotted around the corner to a big doghouse. Just inside the arched door was a big saucer of milk. He lapped it up noisily and lay on the familiar rug with a big nasal sigh.

Science Fiction Index

The valuable task of compiling an annual index of magazine science fiction has been taken over by the amateur publication Destiny, *which will bring out in late May or early June its complete listing covering all science-fantasy magazines, including one-shots, published in the English language in 1953. To make sure of getting one of the limited number of copies of this important reference work (1953 was the most over-crowded year in the history of s. f. magazines, and there's no telling what stories by your favorite writers appeared in magazines you never even heard of), send 25¢ now to Earl Kemp, 3508 N. Sheffield Ave., Chicago 13, Ill.*

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Ordinarily, this is the season of the year when baseball teams, from the majors straight down to the Class D's, are plagued by the advent of weirdies. No spring training camp is ever complete without the presence of at least one screwball, peculiarly equipped with sufficient wild talent to win a pennant single-handed. Mr. Kemp boldly ignores this hoary tradition: His veteran rookie shows up late in the season, joining a team sunk even below the flooring of the cellar. And this player's crazy skill is surely no example for the rest of us clean-living, red-blooded American boys, since it's generated solely by copious quantities of alcohol. But it does win ball games!

The Airborne Baserunner

by LYSANDER KEMP

YOU PROBLY never heard the name of Grasshopper Briggs, on account of he wasn't no Babe Ruth or Tris Speaker, he was just a one-day freak. I guess most people wouldn't believe in him anyways, and I don't know as I blame them. Every now and then one of them sport writers tries to tell the story about Grasshopper, but they always tell it all cockeyed, on account of they think it's just poppycock. The which it ain't. I oughta know, seein' I was on the same club with him at the time.

It all begun up in Boston, the year the Athaletics won the pennant again. It was the same year we won last place again, hands down. It was my next to last year in the majors and I was just a utility infielder, havin' slowed up a lot, and I was settin' on the bench wile the Red Sox helped us to drop one game further into the basement. It was nice of them to help us but we didn't need no assistance. We could of lost the game on errors, even if they hadn't of got a hit.

Well, sir, along about the seventh inning we was behind by nine or ten runs, and old Goeckel, he was our manager, he wasn't what you could call hilarious. His whole name was George Goeckel but everybody just called him Goeckel. He was real short and stocky, and he always had a look on his face like he just now bit into a rotten pickle. As if he didn't have enough troubles, the regular center fielder busted his leg the day before, while slidin' into home for the third out, and the second-stringer was about as handy as a bear with a pitchfork, havin' already made two errors and struck

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out three times. So Goeckel set there frettin' and lookin' blacker than death.

Right in the middle of it, into the dugout come Frank Warner, the general manager, who'd made the trip with us. Warner was a big hearty guy with a paunch, and right now he had a extry-wide grin on his face. Follerin' him come a little mousy-lookin' character that must of been about 50 year old.

"Goeckel!" bellers Warner, and Goeckel almost fell off the bench, on account of Warner had got a voice it was like a foghorn. "Goeckel!" he bellers, "your troubles is over. I found you a center fielder!"

Goeckel jumps up when he hears this, and cracks a smile even bigger than Warner's. But he can't spy no center fielder nowhere, just Warner and the mousy character. Finally he says, "Good, Frank, good, but when's he gonna report?"

Warner let out a beefy chuckle. "Why, here he is, right in front of your ugly nose," he says and give the old-timer a nudge forward. "Meet Mr. Briggs, our new center fielder."

Briggs mumbled "hello" but Goeckel didn't say nothin' at all. He just stood there starin' at him, and his face went through a routine I didn't ever see the like of it. First he looked even stupider than usual. Then he scowled. Then he opened his eyes as big as dishpans. Finally he busted out laughin' like he was a lunatic. "Frank," he said, whoopin' and slappin' hisself on the thighbone, "you got the most sharpest sense of humor I ever seen! No offense to you, Mr. Briggs," he said, and then whooped some more.

Well, sir, you'd naturally expect Warner to start laughin' too, but he just frowned a little. "No, Goeckel," he says, very solemn, "I mean it. He starts tomorrow."

This just set Goeckel to roarin' again and yellin' how all-fired comical Warner is. Old Goeckel was usually a pickle-puss, like I said before, but he could really whoop it up once he got goin'. Then, all of a sudden, he seen by the iceberg look on Warner's face that it ain't no joke at all. For a minute he come close to stranglin' to death. Then he says, "Frank, I got a rotten team, but this is a insult. Even to these slobs it's a insult."

By this time Warner's got a look in his eye it would give chilblains to a polar bear. "Quit your beefin', Goeckel," he says, and lights up a cigar so as to look dignified. "We need a center fielder and here he is."

Goeckel marches up to him and sticks out his chin at him like it was a dagger. "We need *this* guy," he says, pointin' to Briggs, "the way a toad needs a hairnet."

"Well, now," says Warner, steppin' backwards a little, "let's not get all flustered. Let's just get into private somewheres and talk this whole thing over." Goeckel snorted, and kind of stared around like he was a trapped

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animal, but he could tell there wasn't nothin' else he could do except agree. So he told Jake the coach to take over, and him and Warner and the guy from the old folks home disappears, leavin' the whole bench crew flabbergaspin' and shakin' their heads.

Well, sir, after the game we caught a train out of Boston to Philly for a series with the Athaletics, they bein' at the top of the league and headin' for another pennant. We naturally didn't talk about nothin' else on the trip except Briggs, because he was signed onto the team and was ridin' with Warner and Goeckel. They wouldn't let the rest of us even talk with him, so you can see we had somethin' to chew the fat about. Likewise next day at practice, on account of Briggs wasn't nowhere to be found. Matter of fact, we just about decided he wasn't goin' to play after all, which was plain sense considerin' his age and his runty size. Then we found his name was on the startin' line-up, playin' center field and leadin' off. We was so befuzzled we almost bust.

The finishin' touch come when Briggs didn't warm up none or take no battin' practice before the game. All he done was set in the dugout, drinkin' these here fancy dried martinis, which Goeckel poured for him out of a thermos bottle. That took the last straw. Goeckel was always a fiend about keepin' us in good shape, and wouldn't let us drink or smoke or stay out late or nothin'. "You slobs can't hit," he'd say, "and you can't run bases any good, and you can't field your positions, so the least you can do is be healthy." So it set us on our ears to see Goeckel not only lettin' him slurp it up, but actually bottle-feedin' him. We figured Goeckel must of gone nutty as a fruitcake. Tell you the truth, I'd suspicioned before as how he wasn't right in the head, on account of nobody'd want to manage a club like ours without he was a lunatic or a droolin' idjit.

Anyways, it was a pretty good day for baseball. Outside the park they was a kinda stiff wind blowin', but inside it wasn't so bad it would bother the fielders too much. And seein' it was Sunday, Shibe Park was jam-crammed. Our side was naturally up first, on account of we was the visitors, and like I said, Briggs was our leadoff batter. When the time come to begin the game, we watched just dumbfoundered wile Briggs picked out the lightest bat he could find and sauntered out to the plate. None of us could even get off a wisecrack, and old Goeckel sat there guardin' the bottle of martinis and grinnin' wide like a mule chewin' ice.

It took a coupla minutes before the crowd realized Briggs was goin' to bat for us. Then they begun to buzz and yipe and guffaw till the whole park it sounded like a menagerie. You couldn't blame them none. Briggs was the most weirdest-lookin' ballplayer what ever picked up a bat. He had on a uniform it was about twice too big, and he didn't look like he could

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hit a volleyball throwed underhand by a Campfire Girl. It took a good long spell before the stands quieted down, and meanwhile Lefty Grove, the Athaletics pitcher, just stood on the mound starin' at the batter like he was seein' leeprechauns. Jimmy Dykes the third baseman says, "I see they's run out of old men, now they's usin' old ladies."

"Naw," says Jimmy Foxx the first baseman, "that ain't no old lady, that's Goeckel's dear old granpaw."

Well, sir, all this time Briggs ain't emittin' a peep, he's just standin' there at the plate, waitin'. Finally the ump says to Grove he should go ahead and pitch, and the game begun. Lefty got his sign, wound up and really whanged that first one right in there. Briggs didn't move a muscle. Strike one. "Don't pitch so fast," Dykes hollers, "the wind'll knock him over." The next pitch is almost even faster, but it's a little inside and the ump calls it a ball. Grove shakes his head, figurin' he ought to get Briggs outa there on three pitches. But he don't argue about the call, he just winds up and rears back and throws another scorcher, right down the alley.

I still don't know how Briggs seen it, it was so quick, but he seen it all right and swang on it and dribbled a dinkey roller towards third. It was easy as they come, and Dykes charged it, scooped it up, and fired over to Foxx. The thing of it is, Briggs got there first! I can't hardly believe it even now, despite I set there on the bench and seen it. What happened was that as soon as he hit the ball, Briggs dropped the bat and *jumped* to first base in one jump! It wasn't human but that's what he done.

Well, for a moment there wasn't a sound in the whole of Shibe Park. The crowd's mouths just hung open in the sunshine, and every fan and every Athaletic and the whole rest of us was struck plumb dumb, all except Briggs and Goeckel. Goeckel set there grinnin' like a dog chewin' bumblebees. Poor Jimmy Foxx was the most surprised of all. He didn't see Briggs comin', on account of he was takin' the throw from Dykes, and when he turned around he seen Briggs settin' there on the bag like a frog on a lily pad. Next moment, pandemonia busted out. The Athaletics begun shoutin' at the umpires, the umpires begun shoutin' at Briggs and Goeckel, and the fans just shouted. I figured I must be havin' the D.T.'s and was seein' things, except it was Briggs who'd guzzled all them dried martinis.

It must of took a half a hour for the hullaballoo to settle down. After the umpires got their senses back they looked in the rule book, and they wasn't no rule against jumpin' to first base. So finally they had to call him safe. The Athaletics ramped and raved a good bit, but the umpires wouldn't budge.

In the middle of all this, we got Goeckel to explain to us about Briggs. Briggs, he says, was a teetotaler all his life, on account of his battle-ax of a

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wife. But one day at a office party where he worked as a bookkeeper, a few of the boys got him soused on some kind of a drink they said wasn't nothin' but fruit juices. And then when somebody clapped him on the back and throwed him clear across the main office and halfway down a corridor, he seen that instead of gettin' lightheaded like a human bein', he got light all over, and he discovered on the way home that he could jump like a flea. So here he was. It was just as simple as that, and just as crazy. The explanation didn't make much sense to me then, and it still don't, but they wasn't nothin' different we could get out of Goeckel, nor Briggs neither, so it'll have to do. Like I said, I wouldn't of believed it if I hadn't seen it.

So anyways, there was Briggs on first, and the umpires wasn't budgin', so finally everybody got pretty much simmered down. Grove shook his head a few times and set himself to pitch to Billy Whittemore, our shortstop. Briggs didn't take no lead off first, he just stood on the bag. But soon as Grove tossed the first pitch to Whittemore, Briggs give another headfirst leap through the air, and stole second in one jump. Mickey Cochrane the Athaletics catcher didn't even throw down to second. He just crouched behind the plate with the ball in his hand and his eyes glazin' over.

"Haw!" says Goeckel, "he went down there just like a grasshopper." From then on we called Briggs, Grasshopper.

Well, they was another pandemonia after this, except it wasn't so heavy, seein' the rule book didn't change none in the meanwhile. The umpires had to call him safe again, and Grove shook his head a couple times more and threw another pitch to Whittemore. Sure enough, Grasshopper lit out and hopped in one hop to third. This time Cochrane managed to get a throw away, only it hit the grass about halfway down to third, and Dykes had to go off the bag and field it like a grounder. Didn't make no difference nohow, on account of Briggs was there about a half hour before. They wasn't much of a uproar this time. Everybody just figured they'd went clean out of their minds. So the umpires called him safe, and there he was on third, nobody out, and Whittemore with a call of two balls and no strikes. We told Goeckel it would be great to see Grasshopper steal home, but Goeckel just said, "Nope. Not unless I gotta send him in."

Grove was rattled by now, he'd of been a freak if he wasn't, and he give Whittemore a walk. Then he settled down a bit, after he seen Briggs wasn't goin' no place, and struck out Bim Foster, but then Coppola our left fielder hit a long fly and Briggs jumped home after the catch. We mobbed him when he come down into the dugout, but he was real modest and just took a sip of dried martini. Meanwhile Berdan hit into a double play erasin' him and Whittemore, which retired the side. So we was leadin', one to nothin', for about the first time that season.

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That felt real good, to be out ahead for a change, but we didn't expect it to last very long. Our pitcher was Speed Sembower, which he was so speedy he could of been throwin' a cantaloupe and been just as quick. Sembower usually lasted three to four innings. "Come on, now, Speed," says Goeckel wile Sembower is goin' out of the dugout. "Pitch like you never pitched before. Pitch good." Then he guffawed. Funny thing is, Speed did pitch good. Maybe he had somethin' on the ball besides a good intention, or maybe the Athaletics was too befuzzled to see straight. Anyways they couldn't get the ball out of the infield and went down one two three. I sort of hoped somebody'd hit a ball to center field, just to see what Grasshopper would do with it.

Next inning we didn't do nothin', neither did the Athaletics, but in the third Grasshopper come up with two out. This time, Grove and Cochrane and Foxx and a coupla others went into a huddle out by the mound, tryin' to figure how to pitch to him. I don't know what they figured, but it wasn't no good. Briggs tapped the first pitch towards third, and jumped to first ahead of the throw from Dykes. Now they was another huddle out by the hill, and this time they give some advice to Cochrane. That wasn't no good neither. The first pitch was a pitch-out, and Grasshopper leaped down to second, and Cochrane got off a perfect throw to the second baseman coverin' the bag. It was a real lovely throw, right on the button, and it would of been good practice for Cochrane if he needed any practice, but Briggs was down there with a mile to spare. The second pitch was a called strike and the same thing happened and there was Grasshopper on third.

Well, sir, this time I figured Goeckel would hafta have him steal home, since two was out and Whittemore might of been a flossy shortstop but as a hitter he was weak as a rag doll. But I don't know if the steal sign was on or not, cause Grove got nervous all over again with that freak perchin' on third, and let go of a wild pitch way over Cochrane's head. Old Grasshopper took a lazy jump and come floatin' in home as pretty as a blimp comin' in to its moorin'. Whittemore popped out to Foxx and the score was two to nothin'.

The Athaletics picked up a run in the fourth when Simmons hit one of Sembower's slow-motion fast balls for a homer down the left field line, but we got it back in the fifth when Briggs come to bat again. He'd dribbled to third twice in a row, so this time Jimmy Dykes figured to play way in, so he could grab the ball quick and maybe fire it to first in time to nab him. Trouble was, he played in a little too far, right opposite the mound. Briggs noticed this and popped a dinky little fly towards third that was just exactly high enough. Jimmy jumped for it and missed, and was so flustered he fell right over backwards onto the grass and just laid there. And the

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shortstop and Grove was so struck stupid they didn't even stir their stumps. So Grasshopper went Hop! Hop! Hop! the whole way round to third. He'd of made a homer out of it if Dykes hadn't of finally collected his brains and picked up the ball.

You can just guess how that tickled the crowd. They'd just seen what was pretty near a homer on a ball it didn't even roll out of the infield. I've seen some inside the park home runs, but this was the only time I ever come close to seein' a inside the infield home run. They wasn't nobody out, so after Whittemore fanned, Bim Foster brought Grasshopper home with a perfect bunt. Three to one. We commenced to feel real good.

Well, sir, all this while they hadn't none of the Athaletics hit a ball to center field. They'd been a coupla easy flies to left, a ground single to right, but nothin' at all to Briggs. Finally in the sixth, the score still the same and two Athaletics on base and two out, Jimmy Foxx come up. He fouled off two or three, and then swung into one of Sembower's curve balls, which it had about as much of a curve to it as a ruler. You could tell from the crack of the bat it was hit the whole way. I let out a groan like Foxx had hit me over the head, on account of a homer would of drove in the other two base runners and put the A's ahead. That ball whizzled over second and headed for somewheres on the outskirts of Philly, climbin' all the time. I'd wanted somebody to hit somethin' to center, but it sure wasn't this.

Right then, Briggs pulled his next stunt. You'd of thought they wasn't nothin' else uncredible he could of done, but he up and done it again. And I mean *up*. He give a little bounce and rose straight up in the air like one of these helicopters, higher and higher, and made a real lovely nab for the third out. The whole park set there just flabbergaspin' while he floated back down to the playin' field. I felt kind of sorry for Foxx, it was plain pure robbery. When Jimmy walked over to first and picked up his glove he was mumblin' somethin' to hisself.

They didn't nothin' happen in the seventh, leastways on the field. Both sides went out in order. Down in the dugout, though, they was a phone call for Goeckel which we didn't think nothin' about at the moment. He got called away to the phone at the top of the inning, and didn't come back till it was over. When he come back he looked like his old self again, with a long sour black-hearted look on his face. Jake ought to of knowed enough not to ask him questions, but he asked him what the call was so terrible about. "None of your business," says Goeckel, real snappish.

"Well, I just asked you," Jake says.

"Well, I just told you," Goeckel answers. Jake shut up.

Aside from that, they didn't nothin' happen in the seventh, like I said. But somethin' happened in the eighth, and that's for sure. It begun with

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one out. Sembower was still pitchin' pretty good, so when the next batter singled to right it wasn't nothin' to fret about. Then he got a touch of wildness and give up passes to the next two, fillin' the bases. Sure as fate, Al Simmons come up next. Speed couldn't walk him on purpose, that would of forced in a run, but you couldn't throw him just anything neither. So what with his wildness, Sembower got way behind, throwin' three balls in a row. The next pitch was in there, but Al just looked at it. Then he fouled off the next and the count was full. I didn't hardly dare breathe wile Sembower come in with another pitch. He was tryin' his best but he made it too big and good. Simmons took that mighty cut of his and drove it high and far into left center field, and by all that's human it should of been a grand slam homer. But Al made one little mistake—he'd hit it too near to Grasshopper. Old Grasshopper give that little bounce of his, rose way up, way way up, like he was a free balloon risin' at a angle, and made a perfect grab of it.

I guess it was the prettiest catch I ever seen made, and if they'd only of been two outs it would of been wonderful. Trouble is, Al was only the second out. And what come now I sometimes see it in nightmares. A gust of wind come along up there, and instead of sinkin' back down to the field, Grasshopper begun driftin' toward right field, droppin' just a little by little. The three A's that was on base stood gawpin' at him like the rest of us. Finally they realized what was happenin', and they tagged up and begun streakin' towards the plate. Bim Foster the right fielder got under Grasshopper and screeched to him he should drop the ball, but I guess Briggs didn't hear him right and thought he was congratulatin' him. Anyways, he just waved his hand and kept driftin' along with the ball. Then the gust of wind died and he come down far enough so Bim could reach up and grab his ankle. Bim pulled him down like he was takin' in a kite, fished the ball out of Grasshopper's mitt, and plugged it home. It was a fine throw, but by the time it got there the third runner was just goin' down into the A's dugout.

Well, sir, them three put the Athaletics a run ahead, and the stands went beserk. The game had to be held up a minute while Grasshopper collected hisself and jumped back to center. Then Sembower got the next batter for the third out. We was pretty glum in the dugout after that inning, you can guess. You could even say we was shocked. We'd got to thinkin' Grasshopper could do everything, and some of us figured we could maybe even win the pennant with him. Then that little gust come along, and Grasshopper made his boner, and we seen that he might not be human but he wasn't perfect neither. Goeckel didn't look sour no more, he just looked sad, like he wanted to bust down and bawl.

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The top of the ninth begun awful, and it was our last chance to do somethin'. The A's figured the Grasshopper jinx was run out, and Grove looked faster than ever when he struck out our first man up. Poor Goeckel moaned like a sick cow. Then Chickie Dasnoy, our catcher, come to bat, and fanned the breeze on the first two pitches. He was battin' about .042 at the time, and I waited to see him strike out and to see Goeckel shoot hisself at the same moment. But Grove must of accidentally hit Chickie's bat with a fireball, on account of Chickie swung at the next pitch with that clumsy swing of his and the ball went out into right and just barely dropped into the stands for a homer. Four to four. Dasnoy couldn't believe what he'd done, and the third base coach had to shout over and tell him to run around the bases, which he done. Goeckel decided not to shoot hisself right off, and sent me up as a pinch hitter.

I picked me out a bat and went up to the plate not feelin' any too happy, on account of I knew Grove was real mad for lettin' the score get tied up. He was so mad, he just threw me three pitches. So that was two outs. I tramped back to the dugout wishin' I was in Australia, and I expected to find Goeckel had put hisself out of his misery.

But they was still only two outs, and Briggs was the batter. If he could just do something, the jinx would be back on and we could maybe hold the A's in their half of the ninth. So Goeckel was talkin' to Grasshopper real serious. When I got into earshot I heard him say, "Now I got to tell you somethin' bad. You know that phone call I got?"

Briggs just nodded. He was real down at the mouth from havin' let them runs score.

"Well," says Goeckel, "that was from the Commissioner. The Athaletics beefed to him by phone, and he asked me was it true about you and I had to say it was. So he says you can't play no more after today. Unfair competition."

"I expected that'd happen," says Briggs in a mournful voice.

"So did I, and so did Frank Warner," says Goeckel, pattin' him on the back, "but not so blame soon. Anyways, this is your last chance, on account of they'll probably beat us next inning if you don't get a run for us and end the game. So now go out and leave baseball like a hero."

"What'll I do?" Briggs asks.

"That," says Goeckel, "I just don't know."

So poor Grasshopper went up the plate lookin' even older and runtier than ever, and the A's begun hollerin' it up and they figured they had his number.

They hollered too quick. Briggs tapped the first pitch towards third, like always, and hopped to first, like always, and Dykes throwed fast but too

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late, like always. What happened next was pandemonia all over again. Grasshopper'd been usin' his brain while he went to the plate, and seen that even if he could get to third on the next two pitches, they'd as like as not be strikes, seein' that Whittemore was the next batter. And since he couldn't steal home on a third strike, which the third pitch'd probly be on account of Whittemore'd still be the batter, that would end the game because the A's would beat us for sure in extra innings.

So what he done was keep goin'. After he'd hopped to first he turned toward second and sprung into the air again. Foxx took the throw from Dykes and whirled around, expectin' to see Grasshopper sittin' there like a bird on a fence post. He gawped, and then heard the second baseman yellin' at him, so he pegged to second. Meanwhile Briggs'd already hit second and took off for third, but the second baseman didn't see him go, and spun around in case he could make a tag. He just tagged air, and he gawped the way Foxx had and then throwed to third. Old Grasshopper was already past third and sailin' in home like a bluebird. Dykes took the peg from second, and seen that Briggs was goin' to be safe easy, and didn't heave the ball to the catcher. Instead he throwed it high into the grandstand.

Well, sir, that was the end. Whittemore didn't have to bat, the game was over right there. He did bat, of course, and struck out, and the A's batted in their half of the ninth, but they was so bewildered they couldn't do nothin' and we won it, five to four. They wasn't never a game like it before, and they won't never be one like it again. We was mighty happy in the clubhouse right afterwards, with Goeckel just tickled pink at havin' beat the A's. Then we remembered this was Brigg's last game, and was mighty sad. Old Grasshopper went around and shook hands with all of us, to say goodbye. Besides bein' a unusual-type ballplayer, he was a real nice modest little guy and I wished I could of seen him again some time to talk over the old days with him. But I never did, and I guess his old woman must of got him back in the yoke.

After he left, the rest of the season seemed pretty dull. Goeckel tried us all on dried martinis the next day, and we had some good fun but they wasn't none of us was another Grasshopper. We beat the Athaletics the next two games, though, even if we was a little tipsy for the first of them, and they went on to drop a series to the Browns, too. Briggs must of upset them real bad. Of course it didn't keep them from winnin' the pennant, but it slowed them. And what's more, we got back to normal quicker'n they did. By the time they'd clinched the pennant, we'd already clinched last place two whole weeks before.

We played our usual rotten ball the rest of the year. But, like Goeckel said, at least we was healthy.

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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

ALTHOUGH WE KEEP prophesying that the publication of science fiction anthologies must reach a point of diminishing returns, the year 1954 so far threatens to outdo its predecessors, with seven anthologies published in the first eight weeks of the year. These seven books add up to the somewhat terrifying total of 77 stories and two-thirds of a million words (almost as much as a full year's run of any of the leading magazines); and what's more surprising, only one book is really bad, and at least two are prime items, imperatively recommended to you.

Fredric Brown and Mack Reynolds have labored long and valiantly as authors to prove that science fiction doesn't have to be sober and ponderous, that a logical examination of the future may well turn out to be side- as well as atom-splitting. Now they make the same case as editors in SCIENCE-FICTION CARNIVAL (Shasta, $3.50), an anthology of absurdity fully meriting its subtitle, "Fun in science-fiction." Its thirteen hitherto unanthologized stories — highlighted by noble nonsense from H. B. Fyfe, Henry Kuttner, Richard Matheson, William Tenn and the editors themselves — are, we think, particularly calculated to appeal to F&SF readers, less resolutely sobersided than many other s.f. enthusiasts.

Frederik Pohl's STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: NO. 2 (Ballantine, hardcover $2, paper 35¢) needs no recommendation if you read No. 1. Once again Pohl exercises his attractive editorial taste in selecting fourteen stories never before published anywhere — a freshly creative lot, both in writing and in ideas, featuring a superb Alfred Bester, with close competition from Robert Sheckley, C. M. Kornbluth, Jerome Bixby and others.

Also worth adding to your anthology shelf: Groff Conklin's 6 GREAT SHORT NOVELS OF SCIENCE FICTION (Dell, 35¢), in which perhaps only the Sturgeon deserves the adjective in the title, but Heinlein and (unexpectedly) Stuart Cloete contribute rewarding stories and the whole adds up to an unusually large amount (136,000 words!) of solid reading; Andre Norton's SPACE PIONEERS (World, $2.75), flawed by too many stories in which (unlike Conklin's choices) the extensive wordage is not demanded by the plot, but (like Miss Norton's 1953 SPACE SERVICE) so strikingly well-patterned and plausibly realistic that the whole adds up to a better exploration of the future than any individual story; and Donald A. Woll-

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heim's THE ULTIMATE INVADER (Ace, 35¢), which contains a good short story by the late and badly neglected Malcolm Jameson and a fine short novel by Eric Frank Russell — a witty and charming space opera, if you can quite imagine such a work. This Ace Double-Book also includes a reprint of Russell's provocative melodrama, SENTINELS FROM SPACE.

The one negligible collection is Garret Ford's SCIENCE AND SORCERY (FPCI, $3), fifteen stories, chiefly from the files of the magazine *fantasy book*, which average lower, on originality and literacy, than those in any other anthology we've yet read.

We can hardly review the seventh of 1954's anthologies: THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: THIRD SERIES, edited by Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas (Doubleday, $3.25). We can only say that it's available, that it's markedly the longest of our annual collections, and that we hope you'll look into it and let us know what you think. We, or at least one of us, would also be interested in hearing your reactions to the Boucher stories in the Pohl and Conklin collections above.

1954 continues 1953's trend toward excellent original novels, with several serious candidates for Best-of-the-Year already in the lists. Last year just about every other novel dealt with the There-Are-Agents-Among-Us theme; now Edgar Pangborn has handled that theme so definitively in A MIRROR FOR OBSERVERS (Doubleday, $2.95) that we don't see how another word is to be said. The warmth, depth and perception of a true novelist have given wholly new life to the shopworn notion; and the fallible humanity of Pangborn's Martian Observers (from whose viewpoint the story is told) removes this from the paranoid Superman category and makes it a distinguished and moving novel of people, Martian and Terran, and their common problems of free will. And when it comes to details of realistic background, human reactions, and the meaning of music, Mr. Pangborn is no mean Observer himself.

Like Pangborn, Isaac Asimov produces his best long work to date in THE CAVES OF STEEL (Doubleday, $2.95). Asimov has long been an enthusiast of the detective story as well as of science fiction (after all, aren't the classic positronic robot stories really pure deductive puzzles?), and now he has fused his two loves in the most successful attempt yet to combine the forms. As science fiction, this presents a powerful picture of the future interaction of human and robotic cultures, and of the social problems arising from technological unemployment as robots come to replace human workers. As a formal detective story, it sets an ingenious murder puzzle which could occur only in the future, yet which can be fairly solved by today's reader on the terms stated by the author — actually a better fair-play deductive problem than you're apt to find in almost any contemporary mystery novel.

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SEARCH THE SKY, by Frederik Pohl and C. M. Kornbluth (Ballantine, hardcover $2.50, paper 35¢), is not quite another SPACE MERCHANTS, but in a way it's even more entertaining. Basically it's not so much a science fiction novel as a clever s.f. gimmick used as a frame for a series of satiric *Voyages imaginaires* in the Eighteenth Century tradition, detailed sketches of Other Worlds which are cautionary exaggerations of certain socio-political trends clearly evident in our own civilization. The authors are shrewd enough never to let ideological satire hold up the movement of a rousing adventure plot; and the result, if somewhat un-unified, is grand fun on a variety of levels.

Wilson Tucker's WILD TALENT (Rinehart, $2.50) is a trifle unresolved and superficial in handling its theme, familiar but inexhaustible, of the conflict and possible integration between *Homo sapiens* and telepathic *H. superior;* but it's a first-rate melodrama of espionage and power politics, and the realistic portions, especially those dealing with the esper-hero's childhood and growth (the story covers the past two decades, though the publishers label it "a novel of the future"!), contain the most real and communicative writing that Tucker has yet produced.

J. T. McIntosh's BORN LEADER (Doubleday, $2.95) is plausible enough in its study of Earth's first interstellar colonies, but heavy-handed and tedious compared to the McIntosh stories you've been reading here. Philip Wylie (God's Angry Manikin) has, in TOMORROW! (Rinehart, $3.50), inserted a dazzling description of the A-bombing of a city into an unpardonably crude and oversimplified novel — a pity, since Mr. Wylie's urgent plea for more participation in Civilian Defense deserves a more readable vehicle. RIDERS TO THE STARS (Ballantine, 35¢) is a "novelization by Robert Smith based upon the screenplay by Curt Siodmak"; if, unlike any s. f. reader we've ever met, you think that science fiction films have good screenplays, you may be able to endure this.

Two of 1953's fantasy entries deserve brief belated mention here. NOBODY SAY A WORD (Holt, $3.50) is a collection of 33 of Mark Van Doren's short stories, 10 of which are fantasies, some over-quaint, some rich in subtle insight — if conceivably a little *too* subtle for many aficionados. THE ANNALS OF THE CAKCHIQUELS, translated and edited by Adrián Recinos and Delia Goetz (University of Oklahoma, $3.75), is an extraordinary document by Sixteenth Century Guatemala Indians in which supernatural folklore and the details of the Spanish conquest are casually accepted as facts on the same level. Historically significant, it offers less appeal to the general reader than the superb POPOL VUH, a major creative work of indigenous American culture, so well presented by the same editors and publisher in 1950.

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Mr. Porges makes a point that other chroniclers of gods and men seem to have overlooked; i.e., the favors of even a bargain basement little deity can be of an intrinsic value far greater than that specified by their mundane price tag.

$1.98

by ARTHUR PORGES

THAT MORNING Will Howard was taking a Sunday stroll through the woods, a pleasure which lately had been shared and intensified by Rita Henry. Not even the bright sun, the bracing air, the unique song of a canyon wren, could lighten Will's dark thoughts. Right now she was out riding with Harley Thompson at an exclusive country club. Will couldn't blame her. Harley was six feet two, a former Princeton tackle; ruggedly handsome, full of pleasant small talk; the young-executive-with-a-big-future. And he, Will Howard, a skinny, tongue-tied fellow —

At that moment he felt something tug feebly at one trouser cuff, and looked down to see a tiny field mouse pawing frantically at the cloth. Gaping, Will studied the palpitating animal, completely baffled by such strange behavior on the part of so timid a creature. Then the springy, leaping form of a weasel, implacable, fearless even of man, appeared on the trail.

Quickly Will scooped the terrified rodent into one palm. The weasel stopped, making a nasty, chikkering sound, eyes red in the triangular mask of ferocity that was its face. For a heartbeat it seemed about to attack its giant opponent, but as Will stepped forward, shouting, the beast, chattering with rage, undulated off the path.

"You poor little devil," Will addressed the bright-eyed bit of fur in his hand. A crooked smile touched his lips. "You didn't have a chance — just like me and Thompson!" Stooping, he deposited it gently in the underbrush. Then he stared, his jaw dropping. In place of the mouse, there appeared suddenly a chubby, Buddha-like being, some two inches tall. Actually, as measurement would have revealed, it stood precisely one and ninety-eight hundredths inches.

In a voice which although faint was surprisingly resonant, the figure said: "Accept, O kindly mortal, the grateful thanks of Eep, the God. How can I reward you for saving me from that rapacious monster?"

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Will gulped, but being an assiduous reader of Dunsany and Collier, he recovered promptly. "You — you're a god!" he stammered.

"I am indeed a god," the being replied complacently. "Once every hundred years, as a punishment for cheating in chess, I become a mouse briefly — but no doubt you've read similar accounts to the point of excessive boredom. Suffice it to say, you intervened just in time. Now I'm safe for another century — unless, of course, I succumb to temptation again and change a pawn to a bishop. It's hard to resist," he confided, "and helps one's end game immensely."

Will thought of Harley Thompson, the heel that walked like a man. The fellow who laughed at fantasy, who ribbed him for reading the *Magazine of Not-Yet but Could-Be*. Well he knew that behind Thompson's personable exterior was a ruthless, self-seeking, egotistical brute. Rita could never be happy with a man like that. Here was a chance to gain his first advantage over Harley. With the help of a grateful god, much could be achieved. That Dunsany knew the score, all right. Maybe three wishes — but that was tricky. Better let the god himself choose. . . .

"You mentioned a — a reward," he said diffidently.

"I certainly did," the god assured him, swinging on a dandelion stem and kicking minute bare feet luxuriously. "But, alas, only a small one. I am, as you see, a very small god."

"Oh," Will said, rather crestfallen. Then brightening: "May I suggest that a *small* fortune —?" Truly the presence of an immortal was sharpening his wits.

"Of course. But it would have to be exceedingly small. I couldn't go above $1.98."

"Is that all?" Will's voice was heavy with disappointment.

"I'm afraid it is. We minor gods are always pinched for funds. Perhaps a different sort of gift —"

"Say," Will interrupted. "How about a diamond? After all, one the size of a walnut is actually a small object, and —"

"I'm sorry," the god said regretfully. "It would have to be tiny even for a diamond. One worth, in fact, $1.98."

"Curse it!" Will groaned. "There must be something small —"

"There should be," the little god agreed good-naturedly. "Anything I can do, up to $1.98, just ask me."

"Maybe a small earthquake," Will suggested, without much enthusiasm. "I could predict it in advance. Then perhaps Rita —"

"A small earthquake, yes," Eep replied. "I could manage that. But it would be the merest temblor. Doing, I remind you, damage only to the amount of $1.98."

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Will sighed. "You sound like a bargain basement," he protested.

"Of course," the god mused aloud, as if sincerely seeking a solution, "by taking the money in a different currency — say lira — it would *seem* like more; but the value would actually be the same."

"I give up," Will said. Then, in a more kindly voice, as Eep looked embarrassed, "Don't feel too bad. I know you'd like to help. It's not your fault that money's so tight." Glumly he added: "Maybe you'll think of something yet. I'm selling now, or trying to — I'm not much of a salesman. Once the client sold *me* his office furniture. But if you could arrange a good sale —"

"It would bring in only $1.98."

"That wouldn't be easy," Will told him, smiling wryly. "Right now I'm handling diesel locomotives, office buildings, and abandoned mines. And I'm vice-president in charge of dry oil wells."

"Any luck so far?" the little god demanded, kicking a grasshopper, which soared off indignantly.

"I almost sold an abandoned copper mine to a wealthy Californian for an air-raid shelter, but Thompson nosed me out — again. He showed him how one gallery in another mine could be made into the longest — and safest — bar in the world. It killed my sale; the man bought Thompson's mine for $67,000. That infernal Harley!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't mind his getting the supervisor's job instead of me; I'm no good at giving orders, anyhow. Or his stealing my best customers. Even his lousy practical jokes. But when it comes to Rita —! Just when she was beginning to know I'm alive," he added bitterly.

"Rita?" the god queried.

"Rita Henry — she works in our office. A wonderful girl. So sweet, so — alive, and with the most marvelous greenish eyes —"

"I see," Eep said, thumbing his nose at a hovering dragonfly.

"That's why I could use a little help. So do what you can, although it can't help much with a ceiling of —"

"— $1.98," the god completed his sentence firmly. "I shall spend the afternoon and evening here contemplating the place where my navel would be if I were not supernatural. Trust the Great (although small) God Eep. Farewell." He walked into the grass.

Much too depressed for any amusement, Will spent the evening at home, and at 11 went gloomily to bed, convinced that a mere $1.98 worth of assistance, even from a god, was unlikely to solve his problem.

In spite of such forebodings, he was tired enough from nervous strain to fall asleep at once, only to be awakened half an hour later by a timid rapping at the apartment door.

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Blearily, a robe over his pyjamas, he answered it, to find Rita standing on the threshold. She gave him a warm smile that was bright with promise.

"Rita!" he gasped. "Wha —?"

One finger on her lips, she slipped in, closing the door softly behind her. Then she was in his arms, her lips urgent, her body melting.

"Rita," Will murmured, "at last . . ."

She gazed up at him. Was there just a hint of puzzlement, of bewilderment in those green eyes? "Something just seemed to force me . . . I had to come. . . ." She took his hand and led him to the bedroom. There, in the warm darkness, he heard the whispery rustle of silk. "I had to come," Rita said again. "We're right for each other . . . I know. . . ."

The bed creaked and, on reaching out one yearning hand, Will touched skin like sun-warmed satin.

The next morning, when she picked up the wispy panties from the floor where they had been tossed in flattering haste, a scrap of paper dropped from the black nylon.

Wondering, Will picked it up. It was a newspaper clipping. Someone had written in the margin in a tiny, flowing script: "A gratuity from the grateful (up to $1.98) God Eep."

The clipping itself, a mere filler, read: "At present prices, the value of the chemical compounds which make up the human body is only $1.98."

Coming Next Month

In addition to the second exciting installment of *Star Lummox*, by Robert Heinlein, the June issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction (on the stands in early May) will contain:

Heirs Apparent, a powerful short novelet of future history in which Robert Abernathy introduces an acute and authentic analysis of American and Russian character;

Warrior in Darkness, the second of Levi Crow's poetic and moving treatments of the folklore of the Plains Indians — this time strangely fusing that lore with a theme from science fiction!

and stories by Leslie Charteris, Gordon R. Dickson, Michael Saara and others.

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Elsewhere in this issue you'll see that our readers voted Poul Anderson into second place among our authors in 1953, for his alternate-dimension adventure tale, Three Hearts and Three Lions *(F&SF, September-October). Since then, Anderson's story of the life behind chess,* The Immortal Game *(February), has drawn more favorable mail from readers, as of this writing, than any other story so far in 1954. The two had little in common save a stirring sense of high emprise; now, in a completely different vein, Mr. Anderson shows how that venturesome spirit of man can be all but crushed and debased by a society which wilfully fails to comprehend it. This is a story of spacemen, but far from the conventional mood — a bitter story that will leave you wondering, with the author, whether the men of space will be the shining heroes of the future. . . or an outcast race, humiliated by confinement to their —*

Ghetto

by POUL ANDERSON

THE MONORAIL SET them off at Kith Town, on the edge of the great city. Its blaze of light, red and gold and green looped between high slim towers, pulsed in the sky above them, but here it was dark and still, night had come. Kenri Shaun stood for a moment with the others, shifting awkwardly on his feet and wondering what to say. They knew he was going to resign, but the Kithman's rule of privacy kept the words from their lips.

"Well," he said at last, "I'll be seeing you around."

"Oh, sure," said Graf Kishna. "We won't be leaving Earth again for months yet."

After a pause, he added: "We'll miss you when we do go. I — wish you'd change your mind, Kenri."

"No," said Kenri. "I'm staying. But thanks."

"Come see us," invited Graf. "We'll have to get a bunch together for a poker game sometime soon."

"Sure. Sure I will."

Graf's hand brushed Kenri's shoulder, one of the Kith gestures which said more than speech ever could. "Goodnight," he spoke aloud.

"Goodnight."

Words murmured in the dimness. They stood there for an instant

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longer, half a dozen men in the loose blue doublets, baggy trousers, and soft shoes of the Kith in Town. There was a curious similarity about them, they were all of small and slender build, dark complexioned, but it was the style of movement and the expression of face which stamped them most. They had looked on strangeness all their lives, out between the stars.

Then the group dissolved and each went his own way. Kenri started toward his father's place. There was a thin chill in the air, the northern pole was spinning into autumn, and Kenri hunched his shoulders and jammed his hands into his pockets.

The streets of the Town were narrow concrete strips, nonluminous, lit by old-style radiant globes. These threw a vague whiteness on lawns and trees and the little half-underground houses set far back from the roads. There weren't many people abroad: an elderly officer, grave in mantle and hood; a young couple walking slowly, hand in hand; a group of children tumbling on the grass; small lithe forms filling the air with their laughter, filling themselves with the beauty and mystery which were Earth. They might have been born a hundred years ago, some of those children, and looked on worlds whose very suns were invisible here, but always the planet drew men home again. They might cross the Galaxy someday, but always they would return to murmurous forests and galloping seas, rain and wind and swift-footed clouds, through all space and time they would come back to their mother.

Most of the hemispheres Kenri passed were dark, tended only by machines while their families flitted somewhere beyond the sky. He passed the home of a friend, Jong Errifrans, and wondered when he would see him again. The *Golden Flyer* wasn't due in from Betelgeuse for another Earth-century, and by then the *Fleetwing*, Kenri's own ship, might well be gone — *No, wait, I'm staying here. I'll be a very old man when Jong comes back, still young and merry, still with a guitar across his shoulders and laughter on his lips. I'll be an Earthling then.*

The town held only a few thousand houses, and most of its inhabitants were away at any given time. Only the *Fleetwing*, the *Flying Cloud*, the *High Barbaree*, the *Our Lady*, and the *Princess Karen* were at Sol now: their crews would add up to about 1200, counting the children. He whispered the lovely, archaic names, savoring them on his tongue. Kith Town, like Kith society, was changeless; it had to be. When you traveled near the speed of light and time shrank so that you could be gone a decade and come back to find a century flown on Earth — And here was home, where you were among your own kind and not a tommy who had to bow and wheedle the great merchants of Sol, here you could walk like a man.

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It wasn't true what they said on Earth, that tommies were rootless, without planet or history or loyalty. There was a deeper belongingness here than the feverish rise and warring and fall of Sol could ever know.

"— Good evening, Kenri Shaun."

He stopped, jerked out of his reverie, and looked at the young woman. The pale light of a street globe spilled across her long dark hair and down her slim shape. "Oh —" He caught himself and bowed. "Good evening to you, Theye Barinn. I haven't seen you in a long time. Two years, isn't it?"

"Not quite so long for me," she said. "The *High Barbaree* went clear to Vega last trip. We've been in orbit here about an Earth-month. The *Fleetwing* got in a couple of weeks ago, didn't she?"

Covering up, not daring to speak plainly. He knew she knew almost to the hour when the great spaceship had arrived from Sirius and taken her orbit about the home planet.

"Yes," he said, "but our astrogation computer was burned out and I had to stay aboard with some others and get it fixed."

"I know," she answered. "I asked your parents why you weren't in Town. Weren't you — impatient?"

"Yes," he said, and a thinness edged his tone. He didn't speak of the fever that had burned in him, to get away, get downside, and go to Dorthy where she waited for him among the roses of Earth. "Yes, of course, but the ship came first, and I was the best man for the job. My father sold my share of the cargo for me; I never liked business anyway."

Small talk, he thought, biting back the words, chatter eating away the time he could be with Dorthy. But he couldn't quite break away, Theye was a friend. Once he had thought she might be more, but that was before he knew Dorthy.

"Things haven't changed much since we left," she said. "Not in twenty-five Earth-years. The Star Empire is still here, with its language and its genetic hierarchy — a little bigger, a little more hectic, a little closer to revolt or invasion and the end. I remember the Africans were much like this, a generation or two before they fell."

"So they were," said Kenri. "So were others. So will still others be. But I've heard the Stars are clamping down on us."

"Yes." Her voice was a whisper. "We have to buy badges now, at an outrageous price, and wear them everywhere outside the Town. It may get worse. I think it will."

He saw that her mouth trembled a little under the strong curve of her nose, and the eyes turned up to his were suddenly filmed with a brightness of tears. "Kenri — is it true what they're saying about you?"

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"Is what true?" Despite himself, he snapped it out.

"That you're going to resign? Quit the Kith — become an . . . Earthling?"

"I'll talk about it later." It was a harshness in his throat. "I haven't time now."

"But Kenri —" She drew a long breath and pulled her hand back. "Goodnight, Theye. I'll see you later. I have to hurry."

He bowed and went on, quickly, not looking back. The lights and the shadows slid their bars across him as he walked.

Dorthy was waiting, and he would see her tonight. But just then he couldn't feel happy about it, somehow.

He felt like hell.

She had stood at the vision port, looking out into a dark that crawled with otherness, and the white light of the ship's walls had been cool in her hair. He came softly behind her and thought again what a wonder she was. Even a millennium ago, such tall slender blondes had been rare on Earth. If the human breeders of the Star Empire had done nothing else, they should be remembered with love for having created her kind.

She turned around quickly, sensing him with a keeness of perception he could not match. The silver-blue eyes were enormous on him, and her lips parted a little, half covered by one slim hand. He thought what a beautiful thing a woman's hand was. "You startled me, Kenri Shaun."

"I am sorry, Freelady," he said contritely.

"It —" She smiled with a hint of shakiness. "It is nothing. I am too nervous — don't know interstellar space at all."

"It can be . . . unsettling, I suppose, if you aren't used to it, Freelady," he said. "I was born between the stars, myself."

She shivered faintly under the thin blue tunic. "It is too big," she said. "Too big and old and strange for us, Kenri Shaun. I thought traveling between the planets was something beyond human understanding, but this —" Her hand touched his, and his fingers closed on it, almost against his own will. "This is like nothing I ever imagined."

"When you travel nearly at the speed of light," he said, covering his shyness with pedantry, "you can't expect conditions to be the same. Aberration displaces the stars, and Doppler effect changes the color. That's all, Freelady."

The ship hummed around them, as if talking to herself. Dorthy had once wondered what the vessel's robot brain thought — what it felt like to be a spaceship, forever a wanderer between foreign skies. He had told her the robot lacked consciousness, but the idea had haunted him since. Maybe only because it was Dorthy's idea.

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"It's the time shrinking that frightens me most, perhaps," she said. Her hand remained in his, the fingers tightening. He sensed the faint wild perfume she wore, it was a heady draught in his nostrils. "You — I can't get over the fact that you were born a thousand years ago, Kenri Shaun. That you will still be traveling between the stars when I am down in dust."

It was an obvious opening for a compliment, but his tongue was locked with awkwardness. He was a space farer, a Kithman, a dirty slimy tommy, and she was Star-Free, unspecialized genius, the finest flower of the Empire's genetic hierarchy. He said only: "It is no paradox, Freelady. As the relative velocity approaches that of light, the measured time interval decreases, just as the mass increases; but only to a 'stationary' observer. One set of measurements is as 'real' as another. We're running with a tau factor of about 33 this trip, which means that it takes us some four months to go from Sirius to Sol; but to a watcher at either star, we'll take almost eleven years." His mouth felt stiff, but he twisted it into a smile. "That's not so long, Freelady. You'll have been gone, let's see, twice eleven plus a year in the Sirian System — twenty-four years. Your estates will still be there."

"Doesn't it take an awful reaction mass?" she asked. A fine line appeared on the broad forehead as she frowned, trying to understand.

"No, Freelady. Or, rather, it does, but we don't have to expel matter as an interplanetary ship must. The field drive reacts directly against the mass of local stars — theoretically the entire universe — and converts our mercury 'ballast' into kinetic energy for the rest of the ship. It acts equally on all mass, so we don't experience acceleration pressure and can approach light-speed in a few days. In fact, if we didn't rotate the ship, we'd be weightless. When we reach Sol, the agoratron will convert the energy back into mercury atoms and we'll again be almost stationary with respect to Earth."

"I'm afraid I never was much good at physics," she laughed. "We leave that to Star-A and Norm-A types on Earth."

The sense of rejection was strangling in him. Yes, *he thought,* brain work and muscle work are still just work. Let the inferiors sweat over it, Star-Frees need all their time just to be ornamental. *Her fingers had relaxed, and he drew his hand back to him.*

She looked pained, sensing his hurt, and reached impulsively out to touch his cheek. "I'm sorry," she said quietly. "I didn't mean to . . . I didn't mean what you think."

"It is nothing, Freelady," he said stiffly, to cover his bewilderment. That an aristocrat should apologize —!

"But it is much," she said earnestly. "I know how many people there are who don't like the Kith. You just don't fit into our society, you realize that. You've never really belonged on Earth." A slow flush crept up her pale cheeks,

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and she looked down. Her lashes were long and smoky black. "But I do know a little about people, Kenri Shaun. I know a superior type when I meet it. You could be a Star-Free yourself, except . . . we might bore you."

"Never that, Freelady," he said thickly.

He had gone away from her with a singing in him. Three months, he thought gloriously, three ship-months yet before they came to Sol.

A hedge rustled dryly as he turned in at the Shaun gate. Overhead, a maple tree stirred, talking to the light wind, and fluttered a blood-colored leaf down on him. *Early frost this year,* he thought. The weather-control system had never been rebuilt after the Mechanoclasts abolished it, and maybe they had been right there. He paused to inhale the smell of the wind. It was cool and damp, full of odors from mould and turned earth and ripened berries. It struck him suddenly that he had never been here during a winter. He had never seen the hills turn white and glittering, or known the immense hush of snowfall.

Warm yellow light spilled out to make circles on the lawn. He put his hand on the doorplate, it scanned his pattern and the door opened for him. When he walked into the small, cluttered living room, crowded with half a dozen kids, he caught the lingering whiff of dinner and regretted being too late for it. He'd eaten on shipboard, but there was no cook in the Galaxy quite like his mother.

He saluted his parents as custom prescribed, and his father nodded gravely. His mother was less restrained, she hugged him and said how thin he had gotten. The kids said hello and went back to their books and games and chatter. They'd seen their older brother often enough, and were too young to realize what his decision of resigning meant.

"Come, Kenri, I will fix a sandwich for you at least —" said his mother. "It is good to have you back."

"I haven't time," he said. Helplessly: "I'd like to, but — well — I have to go out again."

She turned away. "Theye Barinn was asking about you," she said, elaborately casual. "The *High Barbaree* got back an Earth-month ago."

"Oh, yes," he said. "I met her on the street."

"Theye is a nice girl," said his mother. "You ought to go call on her. It's not too late tonight."

"Some other time," he said.

"The *High Barbaree* is off to Tau Ceti in another two months," said his mother. "You won't have much chance to see Theye, unless —" Her voice trailed off. *Unless you marry her. She's your sort, Kenri. She would belong well on the* Fleetwing. *She would give me strong grandchildren.*

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"Some other time," he repeated. He regretted the brusqueness in his tone, but he couldn't help it. Turning to his father: "Dad, what's this about a new tax on us?"

Volden Shaun scowled. "A damned imposition," he said. "May all their spacesuits spring leaks. We have to wear these badges now, and pay through the nose for them."

"Can . . . can I borrow yours for tonight? I have to go into the city."

Slowly, Volden met the eyes of his son. Then he sighed and got up. "It's in my study," he said. "Come along and help me find it."

They entered the little room together. It was filled with Volden's books — he read on every imaginable subject, like most Kithmen — and his carefully polished astrogation instruments and his mementos of other voyages. It all meant something. That intricately chased sword had been given him by an armorer on Procyon V, a many-armed monster who had been his friend. That stereograph was a view of the sharp hills on Isis, frozen gases like molten amber in the glow of mighty Osiris. That set of antlers was from a hunting trip on Loki, in the days of his youth. That light, leaping statuette had been a god on Dagon. Volden's close-cropped gray head bent over the desk, his hands fumbling among the papers.

"Do you really mean to go through with this resignation?" he asked quietly.

Kenri's face grew warm. "Yes," he said. "I'm sorry, but — Yes."

"I've seen others do it," said Volden. "They even prospered, most of them. But I don't think they were ever very happy."

"I wonder," said Kenri.

"The *Fleetwing's* next trip will probably be clear to Rigel," said Volden. "We won't be back for more than a thousand years. There won't be any Star Empire here. Your very name will be forgotten."

"I heard talk about that voyage." Kenri's voice thickened a little. "It's one reason I'm staying behind."

Volden looked up, challengingly. "What's so good about the Stars?" he asked. "I've seen twelve hundred years of human history, good times and bad times. This is not one of the good times. And it's going to get worse."

Kenri didn't answer.

"That girl is out of your class, son," said Volden. "She's a Star-Free. You're just a damn filthy tommy."

"The prejudice against us isn't racial," said Kenri, avoiding his father's gaze. "It's cultural. A spaceman who goes terrestrial is . . . all right by them."

"So far," said Volden. "It's beginning to get racial already, though.

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We may all have to abandon Earth for a while."

"I'll get into her class," said Kenri. "Give me that badge."

Volden sighed. "We'll have to overhaul the ship to raise our tau factor," he said. "You've got a good six months yet. We won't leave any sooner. I hope you'll change your mind."

"I might," said Kenri, and knew he lied in his teeth.

"Here it is." Volden held out a small yellow loop of braided cords. "Pin it on your jacket." He took forth a heavy wallet. "And here is a thousand decards of your money. You've got fifty thousand more in the bank, but don't let this get stolen."

Kenri fastened the symbol on. It seemed to have weight, like a stone around his neck. He was saved from deeper humiliation by the automatic reaction of his mind. Fifty thousand decards . . . what to buy? A spaceman necessarily invested in tangible and lasting property —

Then he remembered that he would be staying here. The money ought to have value during his lifetime, at least. And money had a way of greasing the skids of prejudice.

"I'll be back . . . tomorrow, maybe," he said. "Thanks, Dad. Goodnight."

Volden's gaunt face drew into tighter lines. His voice was toneless, but it caught just a little.

"Goodnight, son," he said.

Kenri went out the door, into the darkness of Earth.

The first time, neither of them had been much impressed. Captain Seralpin had told Kenri: "We've got us another passenger. She's over at Landfall, on Ishtar. Want to pick her up?"

"Let her stay there till we're ready to leave," said Kenri. "Why would she want to spend a month on Marduk?"

Seralpin shrugged: "I don't know or care. But she'll pay for conveyance here. Take Boat Five," he said.

Kenri had fueled up the little interplanetary flitter and shot away from the Fleetwing, *grumbling to himself. Ishtar was on the other side of Sirius at the moment, and even on an acceleration orbit it took days to get there. He spent the time studying Murinn's* General Cosmology, *a book he'd never gotten around to before though it was a good 2500 years old. There had been no basic advance in science since the fall of the African Empire, he reflected, and on Earth today the conviction was that all the important questions had been answered. After all, the universe was finite, so the scientific horizon must be too; after several hundred years during which research turned up no phen-*

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omenon not already predicted by theory, there would naturally be a loss of interest which ultimately became a dogma.

Kenri wasn't sure the dogma was right. He had seen too much of the cosmos to have any great faith in man's ability to understand it. There were problems in a hundred fields — physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, history, epistemology — to which the Nine Books gave no quantitative answer; but when he tried to tell an Earthling that, he got a blank look or a superior smile. . . . No, science was a social enterprise, it couldn't exist when the society didn't want it. But no civilization lasts forever. Someday there would again be a questioning.

Most of the Fleetwing's *passengers were time-expired engineers or planters returning home. Few of the big ships had ever transported a Star aristocrat. When he came down to Landfall, in a spuming rain, and walked through the hot wet streets and onto the bowered verandah of the town's hostel, it was a shock to find that his cargo was a young and beautiful woman. He bowed to her, crossing arms on breast as prescribed, and felt the stiffness of embarrassment. He was the outsider, the inferior, the space tramp, and she was one of Earth's owners.*

"I hope the boat will not be too uncomfortable for you, Freelady," he mumbled, and hated himself for the obsequiousness of it. He should have said, you useless brainless bitch, my people keep Earth alive and you ought to be kneeling to me in thanks. But he bowed again instead, and helped her up the ladder into the cramped cabin.

"I'll make out," she laughed. She was too young, he guessed, to have taken on the snotty manners of her class. The fog of Ishtar lay in cool drops in her hair, like small jewels. The blue eyes were not unfriendly as they rested on his sharp dark face.

He computed an orbit back to Marduk. "It'll take us four-plus days, Freelady," he said. "I hope you aren't in too much of a hurry."

"Oh, no," she said. "I just wanted to see that planet too, before leaving." He thought of what it must be costing her, and felt a vague sense of outrage that anyone should throw good money around on mere tourism; but he only nodded.

They were in space before long. He emerged from his curtained bunk after a few hour's sleep to find her already up, leafing through Murinn. "I don't understand a word of it," she said. "Does he ever use one syllable where six will do?"

"He cared a great deal for precision, Freelady," said Kenri as he started breakfast. Impulsively, he added: "I would have liked to know him."

Her eyes wandered around the boat's library, shelf on shelf of microbooks and full-sized volumes. "You people do a lot of reading, don't you?" she asked.

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"Not too much else to do on a long voage, Freelady," he said. "There are handicrafts, of course, and the preparation of goods for sale — things like that — but there's still plenty of time for reading."

"I'm surprised you have such big crews," she said. "Surely you don't need that many people to man a ship."

"No, Freelady," he replied. "A ship between the stars just about runs herself. But when we reach a planet, a lot of hands are needed."

"There's company too, I suppose," she ventured. "Wives and children and friends."

"Yes, Freelady." His voice grew cold. What business of hers was it?

"I like your Town," she said. "I used to go there often. It's so — quaint? Like a bit of the past, kept alive all these centuries."

Sure, he wanted to say, sure, your sort come around to stare. You come around drunk, and peer into our homes, and when an old man goes by you remark what a funny little geezer he is, without even lowering your voices, and when you bargain with a shopkeeper and he tries to get a fair price it only proves to you that all tommies think of nothing but money. Oh, yes, we're very glad to have you visit us. "Yes, Freelady."

She looked hurt, and said little for many hours. After a while she went back into the space he had screened off for her, and he heard her playing a violin. It was a very old melody, older than man's starward wish, unbelievably old, and still it was young and tender and trustful, still it was everything which was good and dear in man. He couldn't quite track down the music, what was it —? After a while, she stopped. He felt a desire to impress her. The Kith had their own tunes. He got out his guitar and strummed a few chords and let his mind wander.

Presently he began to sing.

"When Jerry Clawson was a baby
On his mother's knee in old Kentuck,
He said: 'I'm gonna ride those deep-space rockets
Till the bones in my body turn to dust.' —"

He sensed her come quietly out and stand behind him, but pretended not to be aware of her. His voice lilted between the thrumming walls, and he looked out toward cold stars and the ruddy crescent of Marduk.

"— Jerry's voice came o'er the speaker:
'Cut your cable and go free.
On full thrust, she's blown more shielding.
Radiation's got to me.

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'Take the boats in safety Earthward.
Tell the Fireball Line for me
I was born to ride through deep space,
Now in deep space forevermore I'll be.' "

He ended it with a crash of strings and looked around and got up to bow.

"*No . . . sit down,*" *she said.* "*This isn't Earth. What was that song?*"

"Jerry Clawson, *Freelady,*" *he replied.* "*It's ancient — in fact, I was singing a translation from the original English. It goes clear back to the early days of interplanetary travel.*"

Star-Frees were supposed to be intellectuals as well as esthetes. He waited for her to say that somebody ought to collect Kith folk ballads in a book.

"*I like it,*" *she said.* "*I like it very much.*"

He looked away. "*Thank you, Freelady,*" *he said.* "*May I make bold to ask what you were playing earlier?*"

"*Oh . . . that's even older,*" *she said.* "*A theme from the* Kreutzer Sonata. *I'm awfully fond of it.*" *She smiled slowly.* "*I think I would have liked to know Beethoven.*"

They met each other's eyes, then, and did not look away or speak for what seemed like a long time.

The Town ended as sharply as if cut off by a knife. It had been like that for 3000 years, a sanctuary from time: sometimes it stood alone on open windy moors, with no other work of man in sight except a few broken walls; sometimes it was altogether swallowed by a roaring monster of a city; sometimes, as now, it lay on the fringe of a great commune; but always it was the Town, changeless and inviolate.

No — not so. There had been days when war swept through it, pock-marking walls and sundering roofs and filling its streets with corpses; there had been murderous mobs looking for a tommy to lynch; there had been haughty swaggering officers come to enforce some new proclamation. They could return. Through all the endless turmoil of history, they would. Kenri shivered in the wandering autumn breeze and started off along the nearest avenue.

The neighborhood was a slum at the moment, gaunt crumbling tenements, cheerless lanes, aimlessly drifting crowds. They wore doublets and kilts of sleazy gray, and they stank. Most of them were Norms, nominally free — which meant free to starve when there wasn't work to be had. The majority were Norm-Ds, low-class manual laborers with dull heavy faces, but here and there the more alert countenance of a Norm-C or B showed briefly in the glare of a lamp, above the weaving, sliding shadows.

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When a Standard pushed through, gay in the livery of the state or his private owner, something flickered in those eyes. A growing knowledge, a feeling that something was wrong when slaves were better off than freemen — Kenri had seen that look before, and knew what it could become: the blind face of destruction. And elsewhere were the men of Mars and Venus and the Jovian moons, yes, the Radiant of Jupiter had ambitions and Earth was still the richest planet. . . . No, he thought, the Star Empire wouldn't last much longer.

But it ought to last his and Dorthy's lifetime, and they could make some provision for their children. That was enough.

An elbow jarred into his ribs. "Outta the way, tommy!"

He clenched his fists, thinking of what he had done beyond the sky, what he could do here on Earth — Silently, he stepped off the walk. A woman, leaning fat and blowsy from an upstairs window, jeered at him and spat. He dodged the fleck of spittle, but he could not dodge the laughter that followed him.

They hate, he thought. *They still don't dare resent their masters, so they take it out on us. Be patient. It cannot endure another two centuries.*

It still shook in him, though. He grew aware of the tautness in his nerves and belly, and his neck ached with the strain of keeping his face humbly lowered. Though Dorthy was waiting for him in a garden of roses, he needed a drink. He saw the winking neon bottle and turned in that door.

A few sullen men were slumped at tables, under the jerky obscenity of a live mural that must be a hundred years old. The tavern owned only half a dozen Standard-D girls, and they were raddled things who must have been bought third hand. One of them gave Kenri a mechanical smile, saw his face and dress and badge, and turned away with a sniff.

He made his way to the bar. There was a live tender who showed him a glazed stare. "Vodzan," said Kenri. "Make it a double."

"We don't serve no tommies here," said the bartender.

Kenri's fingers whitened on the bar. He turned to go, but a hand touched his arm. "Just a minute, spaceman." To the attendant: "One double vodzan."

"I told you —"

"This is for me, Wilm. And I can give it to anyone I want. I can pour it on the floor if I so desire." There was a thinness in the tone, and the bartender went quickly off to his bottles.

Kenri looked into a white, hairless face with a rakish cast to its skull structure. The lean gray-clad body was hunched over the bar, one hand idly rolling dice from a cup. There were no bones in the fingers, they were small delicate tentacles; and the eyes were colored like ruby.

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"Thank you," said Kenri. "May I pay —"

"No. It's on me." The other accepted the glass and handed it over. "Here."

"Your health, sir." Kenri lifted the glass and drank. The liquor was pungent fire along his throat.

"Such as it is," said the man indifferently. "No trouble to me. What I say here goes." He was probably a petty criminal of some sort, perhaps a member of the now outlawed Assassins' Guild. And the body type was not quite human. He must be a Special-X, created in the genetic labs for a particular job or for study or for amusement. Presumably he had been set free when his owner was done with him, and had made a place for himself in the slums.

"Been gone long?" he asked, looking at the dice.

"About twenty-three years," said Kenri. "Sirius."

"Things have changed," said the X. "Anti-Kithism is growing strong again. Be careful you aren't slugged or robbed, because if you are, it'll do you no good to appeal to the city guards."

"It's nice of you to —"

"Nothing." The slim fingers scooped up the dice and rattled the cup again. "I like somebody to feel superior to."

"Oh." Kenri set the glass down. For a moment, the smoky room blurred. "I see. Well —"

"No, don't go off." The ruby eyes lifted up to his, and he was surprised to see tears in them. "I'm sorry. You can't blame me for being bitter. I wanted to sign on myself, once, and they wouldn't have me."

Kenri said nothing.

"I would, of course, give my left leg to the breastbone for a chance to go on just one voyage," said the X dully. "Don't you think an Earthling has his dreams now and then — we too? But I wouldn't be much use. You have to grow up in space, damn near, to know enough to be of value on some planet Earth never heard of. And I suppose there's my looks too. Even the underdogs can't get together any more."

"They never could, sir," said Kenri.

"I suppose you're right. You've seen more of both space and time than I ever will. So I stay here, belonging nowhere, and keep alive somehow; but I wonder if it's worth the trouble. A man isn't really alive till he has something bigger than himself and his own little happiness, for which he'd gladly die. Oh, well." The X rolled out the dice. "Nine. I'm losing my touch." Glancing up again: "I know a place where they don't care who you are if you've got money."

"Thank you, sir, but I have business elsewhere," said Kenri awkwardly.

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"I thought so. Well, go ahead, then. Don't let me stop you." The X looked away.

"Thank you for the drink, sir."

"It was nothing. Come in whenever you want, I'm usually here. But don't yarn about the planets out there. I don't want to hear that."

"Goodnight," said Kenri.

As he walked out, the dice clattered across the bar again.

Dorthy had wanted to do some surface traveling on Marduk, get to see the planet. She could have had her pick of the colony for escorts, but she chose to ask Kenri. One did not say no to a Star, so he dropped some promising negotiations for pelts with a native chief, hired a groundcar, and picked her up at the time she set.

They rode quietly for a while, until the settlement was lost behind the horizon. Here was stony desert, flamboyantly colored, naked crags and iron hills and low dusty thorn-trees sharp in the thin clear air. Overhead, the sky was a royal blue, with the shrunken disc of Sirius A and the brilliant spark of its companion spilling harsh light over the stillness.

"This is a beautiful world," she said at last. Her tones came muffled through the tenuous air. "I like it better than Ishtar."

"Most people don't, Freelady," he answered. "They call it dull and cold and dry."

"They don't know," she said. Her fair head was turned from him, looking at the fantastic loom of a nearby scarp, gnawed rocks and straggling brush, tawny color streaked with the blue and red lightning of mineral veins.

"I envy you, Kenri Shaun," she said at last. "I've seen a few pictures, read a few books — everything I could get hold of, but it isn't enough. When I think of all you have seen that is strange and beautiful and wonderful, I envy you."

He ventured a question: "Was that why you came to Sirius, Freelady?"

"In part. When my father died, we wanted someone to check on the family's Ishtarian holdings. Everyone assumed we'd just send an agent, but I insisted on going myself, and booked with the Temeraire. *They all thought I was crazy. Why, I'd come back to new styles, new slang, new people . . . my friends would all be middle-aged, I'd be a walking anachronism . . . you know." She sighed. "But it was worth it."*

He thought of his own life, the grinding sameness of the voyages, weeks slipping into months and years within a pulsing metal shell; approach, strangeness, the savage hostility of cruel planets — he had seen friends buried under landslides, spitting our their lungs when helmets cracked open in airlessness, rotting alive with some alien sickness; he had told them goodbye and watched them go off into a silence which never gave them back and had wondered how

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they came to die; and on Earth he was a ghost, not belonging, adrift above the great river of time, on Earth he felt somehow unreal. "I wonder, Freelady," he said.

"Oh, I'll adjust," she laughed.

The car ground its way over high dunes and down tumbling ravines, it left a track in the dust which the slow wind erased behind them. That night they camped near the ruins of a forgotten city, a place which must once have been a faerie spectacle of loveliness. Kenri set up the two tents and started a meal on the glower while she watched. "Let me help," she offered once.

"It isn't fitting, Freelady," he replied. And you'd be too clumsy anyway, you'd only make a mess of it. *His hands were deft on the primitive skillet. The ruddy light of the glower beat against darkness, etching their faces red in windy shadows. Overhead, the stars were high and cold.*

She looked at the sputtering meal. "I thought you . . . people never ate fish," she murmured.

"Some of us do, some don't, Freelady," he said absently. Out here, it was hard to resent the gulf between them. "It was originally tabooed by custom in the Kith back when space and energy for growing food on shipboard were at a premium. Only a rich man could have afforded an aquarium, you see; and a tight-knit group of nomads has to ban conspicuous consumption to prevent ill feeling. Nowadays, when the economic reason has long disappeared, only the older people still observe the taboo."

She smiled, accepting the plate he handed her. "It's funny," she said. "One just doesn't think of your people as having a history. You've always been around."

"Oh, we do, Freelady. We've plenty of traditions — more than the rest of mankind, perhaps."

A hunting marcat screamed in the night. She shivered. "What's that?"

"Local carnivore, Freelady. Don't let it worry you." He slapped his slug-thrower, obscurely pleased at a chance to show — what? Manliness? "No one with a weapon has to fear any larger animals. It's other things that make the danger — occasionally a disease, more often cold or heat or poison gases or vacuum or whatever hell the universe can brew for us." He grinned, a flash of teeth in the dark lean face. "Anyway, if it ate us it would die pretty quickly. We're as poisonous to it as it is to us."

"Different biochemistry and ecology," she nodded. "A billion or more years of separate evolution. It would be strange, wouldn't it, if more than a very few planets had developed life so close to Earth's that we could eat it. I suppose that's why there never was any real extrasolar colonization — just a few settlements for mining or trading or extracting organic chemicals."

"That's partly it, Freelady," he said. "Matter of economics, too. It was

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much easier — in money terms, cheaper — for people to stay at home; no significant percentage of them could ever have been taken away in any event — human breeding would have raised the population faster than emigration could lower it."

She gave him a steady look. When she spoke, her voice was soft. "You Kithmen are a brainy lot, aren't you?"

He knew it was true, but he made the expected disclaimer.

"No, no," she said. "I've read up on your history a little. Correct me if I'm wrong, but since the earliest times of space travel the qualifications have been pretty rigid. A spaceman just had to be of high intelligence, with quick reactions and stable personality both. And he couldn't be too large, physically; but he had to be tough. And a dark complexion must be of some small help, now and then, in strong sunlight or radiation. . . . Yes, that was how it was. How it still is. When women began going to space too, the trade naturally tended to run in families. Those spacemen who didn't fit into the life, dropped out; and the recruits from Sol were pretty similar in mind and body to the people they joined. So eventually you got the Kith — almost a separate race of man; and it evolved its own ways of living. Until at last you had a monopoly on space traffic."

"No, Freelady," he said. "We've never had that. Anyone who wants to build a spaceship and man it himself, can do so. But it's an enormous capital investment; and after the initial glamour had worn off, the average Solarian just wasn't interested in a hard and lonely life. So today, all spacemen are Kithmen, but it was never planned that way."

"That's what I meant," she said. Earnestly: "And your being different naturally brought suspicion and discrimination. . . . No, don't interrupt, I want to say this through. . . . Any conspicuous minority which offers competition to the majority is going to be disliked. Sol has *to have the fissionables you bring from the stars, we've used up our own; and the unearthly chemicals you bring are often of great value, and the trade in luxuries like furs and jewels is brisk. So you are essential to society, but you still don't really belong in it. You are too proud, in your own way, to ape your oppressors. Being human, you naturally charge all the traffic will bear, which gives you the reputation of being gougers; being able to think better and faster than the average Solarian, you can usually best him in a deal, and he hates you for it. Then there's the tradition handed down from Mechanoclastic times, when technology was considered evil and only you maintained a high level of it. And in the puritan stage of the Martian conquest, your custom of wife trading — oh, I know you do it just to relieve the endless monotony of the voyages, I know you have more family life than we do — Well, all those times are gone, but they've left their legacy. I wonder why you bother with Earth at all. Why you don't all just wander into space and let us stew in our own juice."*

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"Earth is our planet too, Freelady," he said, very quietly. After a moment: "The fact that we are essential gives us some protection. We get by. Please don't feel sorry for us."

"A stiff-necked people," she said. "You don't even want pity."

"Who does, Freelady?" he asked.

On the edge of the slum, in a zone bulking with the tall warehouses and offices of the merchant families, Kenri took an elevator up to the public skyway going toward the address he wanted. There was no one else in sight at that point; he found a seat and lowered himself into it and let the strip hum him toward city center.

The skyway climbed fast, until he was above all but the highest towers. Leaning an arm on the rail, he looked down into a night that was alive with radiance. The streets and walls glowed, strings of colored lamps flashed and flashed against a velvet dark, fountains leaped white and gold and scarlet, a flame display danced like molten rainbows at the feet of a triumphal statue. Star architecture was a thing of frozen motion, soaring columns and tiers and pinnacles to challenge the burning sky; high in that airy jungle, the spaceman could hardly make out the river of vehicles and humanity below him.

As he neared the middle of town, the skyway gathered more passengers. Standards in bright fantastic livery, Norms in their tunics and kilts, an occasional visitor from Mars or Venus or Jupiter with resplendent uniform and greedy smoldering eyes — yes, and here came a party of Frees, their thin garments a swirling iridescence about the erect slender forms, a hard glitter of jewels, the men's beards and the women's hair elaborately curled. Fashions had changed in the past two decades. Kenri felt acutely aware of his own shabbiness, and huddled closer to the edge of the strip.

Two young couples passed his seat. He caught a woman's voice: "Oh, look, a tommy!"

"He's got a nerve," mumbled one of the men. "I've half a mind to —"

"No, Scanish." Another feminine voice, gentler than the first. "He has the right."

"He shouldn't have. I know these tommies. Give 'em a finger and they'll take your whole arm." The four were settling into the seat behind Kenri's. "My uncle is in Transsolar Trading. He'll tell you."

"Please, no, Scanish, he's listening!"

"And I hope he —"

"Never mind, dear. What shall we do next? Go to Halgor's?" She attempted a show of interest.

"Ah, we've been there a hundred times. What is there to do? How

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about getting my rocket and shooting over to China? I know a place where they got techniques you never —"

"No. I'm not in the mood. I don't know what I want to do."

"My nerves have been terrible lately. We bought a new doctor, but he says just the same as the old one. They don't any of them know which end is up. I might try this new Beltanist religion, they seem to have something. It would at least be amusing."

"Say, have you heard about Marla's latest? You know who was seen coming out of her bedroom last ten-day?"

Kenri grabbed hold of his mind and forced it away from listening. He didn't want to. He wouldn't let the weariness and sickness of spirit which was the old tired Empire invade him.

Dorthy, he thought. *Dorthy Persis from Canda. It's a beautiful name, isn't it? There's music in it. And the from Candas have always been an outstanding family. She isn't like the rest of the Stars.*

She loves me, he thought with a singing in him. *She loves me. There is a life before us. Two of us, one life, and the rest of the Empire can rot as it will. We'll be together.*

He saw the skyscraper ahead of him now, a thing of stone and crystal and light that climbed toward heaven in one great rush. The insigne of the from Candas burned on its façade, an ancient and proud symbol. It stood for 300 years of achievement.

But that's less than my own lifetime. No, I don't have to be ashamed in their presence. I come of the oldest and best line of all humanity. I'll fit in.

He wondered why he could not shake off the depression that clouded him. This was a moment of glory. He should be going to her as a conqueror. But —

He sighed and rose as his stop approached.

Pain stabbed at him. He jumped, stumbled, and fell to one knee. Slowly, his head twisted around. The young Star grinned in his face, holding up a shockstick. Kenri's hand rubbed the pain, and the four people began to laugh. So did everyone else in sight. The laughter followed him off the skyway and down to the ground.

There was no one else on the bridge. One man was plenty to stand watch, here in the huge emptiness between suns. The room was a hollow cavern of twilight, quiet except for the endless throbbing of the ship. Here and there, the muted light of instrument panels glowed, and the weird radiance of the distorted stars flamed in the viewport. But otherwise there was no illumination, Kenri had switched it off.

She came through the door and paused, her gown white in the dusk. His

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throat tightened as he looked at her, and when he bowed, his head swam. There was a faint sweet rustling as she walked closer. She had the long swinging stride of freedom, and her unbound hair floated silkily behind her.

"I've never been on a bridge before," she said. "I didn't think passengers were allowed there."

"I invited you, Freelady," he answered, his voice catching.

"It was good of you, Kenri Shaun." Her fingers fluttered across his arm. "You have always been good to me."

"Could anyone be anything else, to you?" he asked.

Light stole along her cheeks and into the eyes that turned up at his. She smiled with a strangely timid curve of lips. "Thank you," she whispered.

"Ah, I, well —" He gestured at the viewport, which seemed to hang above their heads. "That is precisely on the ship's axis of rotation, Freelady," he said. "That's why the view is constant. Naturally, 'down' on the bridge is any point at which you are standing. You'll note that the desks and panels are arranged in a circle around the inner wall, to take advantage of that fact." His voice sounded remote and strange to his ears. "Now here we have the astrogation computer. Ours is badly in need of overhauling just now, which is why you see all those books and calculations on my desk —"

Her hand brushed the back of his chair. "This is yours, Kenri Shaun? I can almost see you working away on it, with that funny tight look on your face, as if the problem were your personal enemy. Then you sigh, and run your fingers through your hair, and put your feet on the desk to think for a while. Am I right?"

"How did you guess, Freelady?"

"I know. I've thought a great deal about you, lately." She looked away, out to the harsh blue-white stars clustered in the viewport.

Suddenly her fists gathered themselves. "I wish you didn't make me feel so futile," she said.

"You —"

"This is life, here." She spoke swiftly, blurring the words in her need to say them. "You're keeping Earth alive, with your cargoes. You're working and fighting and thinking about — about something real. Not about what to wear for dinner and who was seen where with whom and what to do tonight when you're too restless and unhappy to stay quietly at home. You're keeping Earth alive, I said, and a dream too. I envy you, Kenri Shaun. I wish I were born into the Kith."

"Freelady —" It rattled in his throat.

"No use." She smiled, without self-pity. "Even if a ship would have me, I could never go. I don't have the training, or the inborn strength, or the patience, or — No! Forget it." There were tears in the ardent eyes. "When I get home,

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knowing now what you are in the Kith, will I even try to help you? Will I work for more understanding of your people, kindness, common decency? No. I'll realize it's useless even to try. I won't have the courage."

"*You'd be wasting your time, Freelady,*" *he said.* "*No one person can change a whole culture. Don't worry about it.*"

"*I know,*" *she replied.* "*You're right, of course. You're always right. But in my place,* you *would try!*"

They stared at each other for a long moment.

That was the first time he kissed her.

The two guards at the soaring main entrance were giants, immobile as statues in the sunburst glory of their uniforms. Kenri had to crane his neck to look into the face of the nearest. "The Freelady Dorthy Persis is expecting me," he said.

"*Huh?*" Shock brought the massive jaw clicking down.

"That's right." Kenri grinned and extended the card she had given him. "She said to look her up immediately."

"But — there's a party going on —"

"Never mind. Call her up."

The guardsman reddened, opened his mouth, and snapped it shut again. Turning, he went to the visiphone booth. Kenri waited, regretting his insolence. *Give 'em a finger and they'll take your whole arm.* But how else could a Kithman behave? If he gave deference, they called him a servile bootlicker; if he showed his pride, he was an obnoxious pushing bastard; if he dickered for a fair price, he was a squeezer and bloodsucker; if he spoke his own old language to his comrades, he was being secretive; if he cared more for his skyfaring people than for an ephemeral nation, he was a traitor and coward; if —

The guard returned, shaking his head in astonishment. "All right," he said sullenly. "Go on up. First elevator to your right, fiftieth floor. But watch your manners, tommy."

When I'm adopted into the masters, thought Kenri savagely, *I'll make him eat that word.* Then, with a new rising of the unaccountable weariness: *No. Why should I? What would anyone gain by it?*

He went under the enormous curve of the door, into a foyer that was a grotto of luminous plastic. A few Standard servants goggled at him, but made no move to interfere. He found the elevator cage and punched for 50. It rose in a stillness broken only by the sudden rapid thunder of his heart.

He emerged into an anteroom of red velvet. Beyond an arched doorway, he glimpsed colors floating, a human blaze of red and purple and gold; the air was loud with music and laughter. The footman at the entrance

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stepped in his path, hardly believing the sight. "You can't go in there!"

"The hell I can't." Kenri shoved him aside and strode through the arch. The radiance hit him like a fist, and he stood blinking at the confusion of dancers, servants, onlookers, entertainers — there must be a thousand people in this vaulted chamber.

"Kenri! Oh, Kenri —"

She was in his arms, pressing her mouth to his, drawing his head down with shaking hands. He strained her close, and the misty cloak she wore whirled about to wrap them in aloneness.

One moment, and then she drew back breathlessly, laughing a little. It wasn't quite the merriment he had known, there was a thin note to it, and shadows lay under the great eyes. She was very tired, he saw, and pity lifted in him. "Dearest," he whispered.

"Kenri, not here . . . Oh, darling, I hoped you would come sooner, but — No, come with me now, I want them all to see the man I've got me." She took his hand and half dragged him forward. The dancers were stopping, pair by pair as they noticed the stranger, until at last there were a thousand faces stiffly turned to his. Silence dropped like a thunderclap, but the music kept on. It sounded tinny in the sudden quiet.

Dorthy shivered. Then she threw back her head with a defiance that was dear to him and met the eyes. Her arm rose to bring the wristphone to her lips, and the ceiling amplifiers boomed her voice over the room: "Friends, I want to announce . . . Some of you already know . . . well, this is the man I'm going to marry —"

It was the voice of a frightened little girl. Cruel to make it loud as a goddess talking.

After a pause which seemed to last forever, somebody performed the ritual bow. Then somebody else did, and then they were all doing it, like jointed dolls. There were a few scornful exceptions, who turned their backs.

"Go on!" Dorthy's tones grew shrill. "Go on dancing. Please! You'll all — later —" The orchestra leader must have had a degree of sensitivity, for he struck up a noisy tune and one by one the couples slipped into a figure dance.

Dorthy looked hollowly up at the spaceman. "It's good to see you again," she said.

"And you," he replied.

"Come." She led him around the wall. "Let's sit and talk."

They found an alcove, screened from the room by a trellis of climbing roses. It was a place of dusk, and she turned hungrily to him. He felt how she trembled.

"It hasn't been easy for you, has it?" he asked tonelessly.

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"No," she said.

"If you —"

"Don't say it!" There was fear in the words. She closed his mouth with hers.

"I love you," she said after a while. "That's all that matters, isn't it?"

He didn't answer.

"Isn't it?" she cried.

He nodded. "Maybe. I take it your family and friends don't approve of your choice."

"Some don't. Does it matter, darling? They'll forget, when you're one of us."

"One of you — I'm not born to this," he said bleakly. "I'll always stick out like — Well, never mind. I can stand it if you can."

He sat on the padded bench, holding her close, and looked out through the clustered blooms. Color and motion and high harsh laughter — it wasn't his world. He wondered why he had ever assumed it could become his.

They had talked it out while the ship plunged through night. She could never be of the Kith. There was no room in a crew for one who couldn't endure worlds never meant for man. He would have to join her instead. He could fit in, he had the intelligence and adaptability to make a place for himself.

What kind of place? he wondered as she nestled against him. A planner of more elaborate parties, a purveyor of trivial gossip, a polite ear for boredom and stupidity and cruelty and perversion — No, there would be Dorthy, they would be alone in the nights of Earth and that would be enough.

Would it? A man couldn't spend all his time making love.

There were the big trading firms, he could go far in one of them. (Four thousand barrels of Kalian jung oil rec'd pr. acct., and the fierce rains and lightning across the planet's phosphorescent seas. A thousand refined thorium ingots from Hathor, and moonlight sparkling the crisp snow and the ringing winter stillness. A bale of green furs from a newly discovered planet, and the ship had gone racing through stars and splendor into skies no man had ever seen.) Or perhaps the military. (Up on your feet, soldier! Hup, hup, hup, hup! . . . Sir, the latest Intelligence report on Mars . . . Sir, I know the guns aren't up to spec, but we can't touch the contractor, his patron is a Star-Free. . . . The General commands your presence at a banquet for staff officers. . . . Now tell me, Colonel Shaun, tell me what you *really* think will happen, you officers are all so *frightfully* close-mouthed. . . . Ready! Aim! Fire! So perish all traitors to the Empire!) Or even the science centers. (Well, sir, according to the book, the formula is . . .)

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Kenri's arm tightened desperately about Dorthy's waist.

"How do you like being home?" he asked. "Otherwise, I mean."

"Oh — fine. Wonderful!" She smiled uncertainly at him. "I was so afraid I'd be old-fashioned, out of touch, but no, I fell in right away. There's the most terribly amusing crowd, a lot of them children of my own old crowd. You'll love them, Kenri. I have a lot of glamour, you know, for going clear to Sirius. Think how much you'll have!"

"I won't," he grunted. "I'm just a tommy, remember?"

"Kenri!" Anger flicked across her brow. "What a way to talk. You aren't, and you know it, and you won't be unless you insist on thinking like one all the time —" She caught herself and said humbly: "I'm sorry, darling. That was a terrible thing to say, wasn't it?"

He stared ahead of him.

"I've been, well, infected," she said. "You were gone so long. You'll cure me again."

Tenderness filled him, and he kissed her.

"A-hum! Pardon!"

They jerked apart, almost guiltily, and looked up to the two who had entered the alcove. One was a middle-aged man, austerely slender and erect, his night-blue tunic flashing with decorations; the other was younger, pudgy-faced, and rather drunk. Kenri got up. He bowed with his arms straight, as one equal to another.

"Oh, you must meet, I know you'll like each other —" Dorthy was speaking fast, her voice high. "This is Kenri Shaun. I've told you enough about him, haven't I?" A nervous little laugh. "Kenri, my uncle, Colonel from Canda of the Imperial Staff, and my nephew, the Honorable Lord Doms. Fancy coming back and finding you have a nephew your own age!"

"Your honor, sir." The colonel's voice was as stiff as his back. Doms giggled.

"You must pardon the interruption," went on from Canda. "But I wished to speak to . . . to Shaun as soon as possible. You will understand, sir, that it is for the good of my niece and the whole family."

Kenri's palms were cold and wet. "Of course," he said. "Please sit down."

"Thank you." From Canda lowered his angular frame onto the bench, next to the Kithman; Doms and Dorthy sat at opposite ends, the young man slumped over and grinning. "Shall I send for some wine?"

"Not for me, thanks," said Kenri huskily.

The cold eyes were level on his. "First," said the colonel, "I want you to realize that I do not share this absurd race prejudice which is growing up

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about your people. It is demonstrable that the Kith is biologically equal to the Star families, and doubtless superior to some." His glance flickered contemptuously over to Doms. "There is a large cultural barrier, of course, but if that can be surmounted, I, for one, would be glad to sponsor your adoption into our ranks."

"Thank you, sir." Kenri felt dizzy. No Kithman had ever gone so high in all history. That it should be *him*—! He heard Dorthy's happy little sigh as she took his arm, and something of the frozenness within him began to thaw. "I'll . . . do my best—"

"But will you? That is what I have to find out." From Canda leaned forward, clasping his gaunt hands between his knees. "Let us not mince words. You know as well as I that there is a time of great danger ahead for the Empire, and that if it is to survive the few men of action left must stand together and strike hard. We can ill afford the weaklings among us; we can certainly not afford to have strong men in our midst who are not wholeheartedly for our cause."

"I'll be . . . loyal, sir," said Kenri. "What more can I do?"

"Much," said the colonel. "Considerable of it may be distasteful to you. Your special knowledge could be of high value. For example, the new tax on the Kith is not merely a device to humiliate them. We need the money. The Empire's finances are in bad shape, and even that little bit helps. There will have to be further demands, on the Kith as well as everyone else. You can assist us in guiding our policy, so that they are not goaded to the point of abandoning Earth altogether."

"I—" Kenri swallowed. He felt suddenly ill. "You can't expect—"

"If you won't, then you won't, and I cannot force you," said from Canda. There was a strange brief sympathy in the chill tones. "I am merely warning you of what lies ahead. You could mitigate the lot of your . . . former . . . people considerably, if you help us."

"Why not . . . treat them like human beings?" asked Kenri. "We'll always stand by our friends."

"Three thousand years of history cannot be canceled by decree," said from Canda. "You know that as well as I."

Kenri nodded. It seemed to strain his neck muscles.

"I admire your courage," said the aristocrat. "You have started on a hard road. Can you follow it through?"

Kenri looked down.

"Of course he can," said Dorthy softly.

Lord Doms giggled. "New tax," he said. "Slap a new one on fast. I've got one tommy skipper on the ropes already. Bad voyage, debts, heh!"

Red and black and icy blue, and the shriek of lifting winds.

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"Shut up, Doms," said the colonel. "I didn't want you along."

Dorthy's head leaned back against Kenri's shoulder. "Thank you, uncle," she said. There was a lilt in her voice. "If you'll be our friend, it will all work out."

"I hope so," said from Canda.

The faint sweet odor of Dorthy's hair was in Kenri's nostrils. He felt the gold waves brushing his cheek, but still didn't look up. There was thunder and darkness in him.

Doms laughed. "I got to tell you 'bout this spacer," he said. "He owes the firm money, see? I can take his daughter under contract if he doesn't pay up. Only his crew are taking up a collection for him. I got to stop that somehow. They say those tommy girls are mighty hot. How about it, Kenri? You're one of us now. How are they, really? Is it true that —"

Kenri stood up. He saw the room swaying, and wondered dimly if he was wobbling on his feet or not.

"Doms," snapped from Canda, "if you don't shut your mouth —"

Kenri grabbed a handful of Lord Doms' tunic and hauled him to his feet. The other hand became a fist, and the face squashed under it.

He stood over the young man, weaving, his arms hanging loose at his sides. Doms moaned on the floor. Dorthy gave a small scream. From Canda leaped up, clapping his hand to a sidearm.

Kenri lifted his eyes. There was a thickness in his words. "Go ahead and arrest me," he said. "Go on, what are you waiting for?"

"K-k-kenri —" Dorthy touched him with shaking hands.

From Canda grinned and nudged Doms with a boot. "That was foolish of you, Kenri Shaun," he said, "but the job was long overdue. I'll see that nothing happens to you."

"But this Kith girl —"

"She'll be all right too, I daresay, if her father can raise that money." The hard eyes raked Kenri's face. "But remember, my friend, you cannot live in two worlds at once. You are not a Kithman any longer."

Kenri straightened. He knew a sudden dark peace, as if all storms had laid themselves to rest. His head felt a little empty, but utterly clear.

It was a memory in him which had opened his vision and shown him what he must do, the only thing he could do. There was a half-human face and eyes without hope and a voice which had spoken: "*A man isn't really alive till he has something bigger than himself and his own little happiness, for which he'd gladly die.*"

"Thank you, sir," he said. "But I am a Kithman. I will always be."

"*Kenri* —" Dorthy's tone broke. She held his arms and stared at him with wildness.

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His hand stroked her hair. "I'm sorry, dearest," he said gently.

"Kenri, you can't go, you can't, you can't —"

"I must," he said. "It was bad enough that I should give up everything which had been my life for an existence that to me is stupid and dreary and meaningless. For you, I could have stood that. But you are asking me to be a tyrant, or at least to be a friend of tyrants. You're asking me to countenance evil. I can't do it. I wouldn't if I could." He took her shoulders and looked into the unseeing bewilderment of her eyes. "Because that would, in the end, make me hate you, who had so twisted my own self, and I want to go on loving you. I will always love you."

She wrenched away from him. He thought that there were psychological treatments to change her feelings and make her stop caring about him. Sooner or later, she'd take one of those. He wanted to kiss her farewell, but he didn't quite dare.

Colonel from Canda extended a hand. "You will be my enemy, I suppose," he said. "But I respect you for it. I like you, and wish — well, good luck to you, Kenri Shaun."

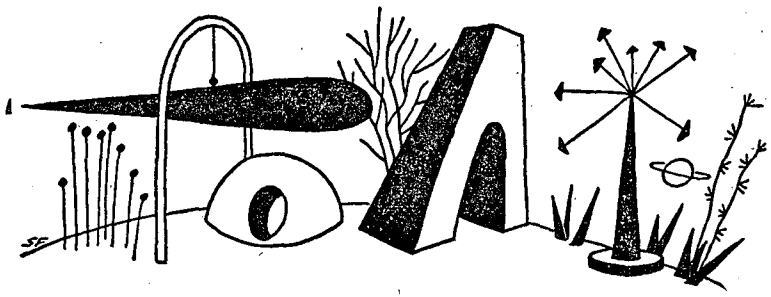
"And to you, sir . . . Goodbye, Dorthy."

He walked through the ballroom, not noticing the eyes that were on him, and out the door to the elevator. He was still too numb to feel anything, that would come later.

Theye Barinn is a nice girl, he thought somewhere on the edge of his mind. *I'll have to go around and see her soon. We could be happy together.*

It seemed like a long while before he was back in the Town. Then he walked along empty streets, alone within himself, breathing the cool damp night wind of Earth.

NOTE: *The space-ballad quoted on page 103 is printed by permission of the author, Gordon R. Dickson.*



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Speculations upon the inherent paradoxes of time travel have been endless; but it takes a girl with "a rare and enviable blending of Irish credulity and commonsense" to recognize the greatest paradox of all: that a paradox cannot exist.

The Poundstone Paradox

by ROGER DEE

"I CAN NOT emphasize too strongly," said Director Huvian Five Pgoram, his hand on the switch of the temporal translator that stood ready to hurl the couple before him back twelve hundred fifty years into the past, "the danger of personal interference in the affairs of Poet-Scientist Lowell Poundstone as you will find them in the year 1957. The fact that you are yourselves his lineal descendants is no excuse for deviation; you are observers only and must remember that any slightest alteration of past events may give rise to such paradoxes as will upset the entire course of history."

He scowled with a mediator's impartial crochetiness at the young man and woman in the translator, regretting secretly that his world of 3207 should ever have let itself be divided, through pursuing general rather than particular specialization, into opposing camps of the esthetic and the practical. It was disheartening enough that all art should be lumped together under the over-broad head of Poesy (as all technical endeavor was aligned under the antiseptic banner of Science) and that the two factions should contend with ever-growing bitterness for ascendance; but that the crucial issue between them should have degenerated into a dispute concerning the cryptic decision of a man over twelve centuries dead was, in Huvian Five Pgoram's judicial opinion, the last futile straw of inconsistency.

But the issue, now forced, must be settled, and the responsibility for its settling was Huvian Five Pgoram's.

"The risk has been justified," said the Director, "on the grounds that the mounting contention regarding Poundstone's historic switch at the height of his literary powers from Poesy to Science has become a civil issue so serious as to threaten the sociological balance of our culture unless the riddle be resolved to the satisfaction of all. You are to discover why Poundstone changed his mind, and so put an end to the dispute between our

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parties of Poesy and Science. Are you fully aware of your obligations?"

The two latter-day scions of the Poundstone line, chosen months before as representatives of their respective factions and as a consequence having heard Pgoram's harangue some 30 times already, paid him scant attention.

"Only to see the Master Poet in the flesh were reward enough for any risk," said Vina Hagaio. She was an attenuated young thing with wide blue eyes, a great deal of light hair and a generally rapturous look that clung to her like an aura in spite of her outlandish period clothing. "But to see him, perhaps, as he penned in his quaint study the lines of his immortal *Purpose:*

"cosmos is a two
humped camel
(lurching dichotomy): man woman
woman man and who
knows (?) which
is first (last/first glassily
glancingly or) means
more. sometimes.

"Or to hear from his own lips the ringing, golden —"

Lal Morin, a large blond young man indelibly stamped with the Scientist's athletic competence, interrupted impatiently.

"Time deteriorates," he said in the archaic patois learned through patient months of study. "Let us place this show on the thoroughfare."

Huvian Five Pgoram, who as Director despised both parties but who had spent a weary lifetime in mediating between them, found himself in reluctant agreement.

"Beware of paradoxes," he warned, and pressed the button.

The timing of the temporal translator was accurate but unfortunate: accurate because its vehicular component materialized at precisely the chosen date in the flower-scented dusk of the ancestral Poundstone gardens, and unfortunate because the place was already occupied.

The occupants were the Master Poet himself, a large blond young man with a small silky mustache and a drunken gleam in his eye, and a young woman with soft auburn hair and a warm curvature of figure seldom met with in the severely functional age of 3207. The two were wrestling vigorously at the moment in a contest made not too uneven by reason of the Poet's alcoholic unsteadiness and the girl's angry determination.

They broke apart as our time travelers stepped out of their translator, and the young woman, exhibiting a surprising agility for one balanced so

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precariously on antique high heels, kicked the Poet forcibly in the stomach with an enthusiasm that stretched him, gasping, on the grass.

"I didn't come here tonight to play games, you adolescent Adonis," she panted. "I came to tell you that our engagement is broken."

In the act of stripping the ring from her finger she caught sight of Lal Morin and Vina Hagaio, who looked on in some confusion and with no comprehension at all, and her eyes widened.

"What the devil is this?" she demanded, staring. "Don't tell me that dear, canny Lowell has hired himself a double to take his raps!"

The resemblance between Lal Morin and Lowell Poundstone was, in point of fact, something more than remarkable: except for the Master Poet's downy mustache, Bohemian dress and general air of pudgy petulance, the two might have passed for twins. The likeness was surprising but not inexplicable, and neither Lal Morin nor Vina Hagaio — both of whom had grown up in a culture which frowned on lying for the sake of convenience — attempted to withhold explanation.

"Like paternal parent, like male offspring," said Lal Morin. "Since I am a direct descendant some fifty generations removed of Poundstone the Scientist, it is obvious that a simple quirk of heredity is responsible for the resemblance."

"We have come from the year 3207," elaborated Vina Hagaio, who advanced like one hypnotized to kneel beside the groaning Poundstone, "to investigate the historic circumstances which determined the Master Poet to forsake inspired Poesy for gross Science."

It was not until the truth was out that either of them recalled Huvian Five Pgoram's dire warnings against interference with past minutiæ. No immediate catastrophe resulted, however, for the reason that Myra O'Donnell, until a few moments ago affianced to the Poet, possessed a rare and enviable blending of Irish credulity and commonsense.

"In that case," said Myra, "I suggest that we adjourn to a more civilized setting and discuss this thing properly. For, as God and I know only too well, there is practically no circumstance in the affairs of Lowell Poundstone that doesn't need investigation."

Vina Hagaio, who had overcome her awe of the Poet enough to touch one flaccid hand, flared unexpectedly from reverence to resentment. "Then it *is* true that he was not really understood in his own time — poor Genius of Poesy, to live his life surrounded by greedy commercialists and fat female troglodytes!"

"We'll discuss troglodytes later," Myra said, too sweetly. "I think we'd better go inside now, if you can tear yourself loose from that phony jinglesmith, before my prehistoric temper gets out of hand."

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The order of their adjournment was in itself significant, though only Lal Morin seemed not to realize it. Vina Hagaio, moved by an idolatry too deeply ingrained to be shaken even by so inauspicious an introduction to her paragon, helped Poundstone to his feet and murmured breathlessly into his ear on their way to the big house above the gardens. Lal Morin and Myra O'Donnell followed a few steps behind, eying each other with interest but saying nothing whatever.

The discussion that followed (in the ancestral Poundstone library, since it developed that the furniture throughout the rest of the house was crated for removal) was enlightening but hardly conclusive. Lal Morin, finding no other alternative — and unsupported by Vina Hagaio, who in her solicitude for the Poet's comfort had no time for trivia — told all. Myra O'Donnell listened, and was convinced against her better judgment. Lowell Poundstone ignored them bitterly, finding sullen solace in the twittering concern of Vina Hagaio and in a bottle of rye whisky unearthed from behind a stiff row of unworn Whitmans.

"It's hard to believe," Myra said finally, "that Lowell will ever be considered even a mediocre poet, let alone a great scientist. I've known the wastrel worm all his life, else I'd never have grown into the idea of making something of him, and he's never succeeded at anything beyond drinking and philandering and squandering his inheritance. At this moment the Poundstone estate is under attachment for debt, and not one of his disjointed scribblings has seen print."

"But they will," Lal Morin said soberly. "Once his revolutionary scientific discoveries have popularized his name and prepared the world to accept his earlier eccentricities. His first historic innovation, antigravity —"

"Was of no importance whatever except to literal-minded mechanics," Vina Hagaio put in tartly. "But his first *poem!* It was titled *Futility*, and began:

"Life is a hornet's nest
of angry avatars humming
zooming —"

"Pointless drivel," said Lal Morin without taking his eyes from Myra's animated face. "On a level with absent doodling, and unworthy of the mathematical genius that gave the world antigravity and packaged atomic power."

He sighed an unscientific sigh. "I must admit to being disappointed at learning his true personal character. And after tonight's introduction I find it depressing to remember that you married him after all, directly before his switch from Poesy to Science."

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Myra stared at him, thunderstruck. "History records *that?* Then history is wrong! I wouldn't marry that lout now if—"

"Wouldn't hear of it myself," Poundstone muttered. "Fat female troglodyte—lovely, *touché!*—never gave me anything but trouble. Like skinny app-appreesh—understanding women better."

He finished his bottle and confided to Vina Hagaio, who murmured understandingly for Myra's benefit, that history recorded that Myra had never understood the Master Poet.

"Nobody ever did," Poundstone declared. "Nobody ever had *intelligence* enough to appreesh—understand my work. Especially Myra, who's a merc'nary fat female troglodyte bitch."

Lal Morin, who had never before in his carefully conditioned life experienced the urge to violence, rose abruptly and dealt his renowned ancestor a clout to the mustache that left him, for the second time that evening, flat on his back.

"Miss O'Donnell," Lal Morin said distinctly, "definitely is not a fat female troglodyte. And you may recline upon that."

"He's laying to it," Myra agreed. And, wryly, for Vina's benefit: "I won't complain if he left out a point or two. All women are born mercenary, and general bitchiness seems too strong a characteristic to be bred out even in fifty generations."

There was an uncomfortable hiatus while Vina Hagaio chafed Poundstone's wrists and Lal Morin struggled to unsnarl his tangled motivations. It was Myra who broke the silence.

"There's a great deal more to this than meets the eye," she said, looking at Lal Morin. "Your history is wrong about my marrying Lowell, and *you* may recline upon that. And while he may some day be recognized as a poet, he'll never make a scientist. It's impossible."

"But history records it!" Vina Hagaio broke in. "Just as it records his marriage to you—though I understand *that* less and less! I know from memory the whole noble story of his struggle for literary recognition, of his bitter years of toil and frustration, of his eventual unfortunate decision to turn to Science to recoup his dwindling fortunes and of his final mighty outpouring of defiance that signaled his farewell to Poesy:

"farewell you poor suckers
leaping like fleas
from reality—"

"It's still sour," Myra said firmly. "I positively will not marry that creep even if Lal goes back to your silly future, and Lowell Poundstone will

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never make a scientist of himself in a geologic age. He doesn't even know yet why apples fall from trees!"

"But it must be true," Lal Morin said unhappily. "Both Vina and I are his direct descendants, and we know the Poundstone genealogy in detail. Unless we have introduced a paradox and have changed the whole course of history by our interference —"

"Nuts," Myra interrupted. "What was, was, else it wouldn't have been. Keep quiet, will you? I've just thought of something."

She seized his arm and towed him, ignoring the scandalized Vina Hagaio, from the library to the balcony outside.

"I think I can tell you the score now," she said, closing the doors behind them, "but there's one thing I've got to be sure about first. Kiss me."

Two minutes later she said, breathlessly: "All right, I'm sure now. Here's what I think —"

"My training for temporal travel prepared me for its more obvious complications," Lal Morin said, "but such a situation as this is beyond anything I've seen even in imaginative fiction. Great Deity, the paradoxes involved!"

The maze of interlocking possibilities, when he considered them, left him stunned. "If we should do as you suggest, inducing Poundstone to exchange identities with me and to return to 3207 in my stead —"

"But we've already done that, in your future," Myra argued. "We have, don't you see, else the Poundstone of history could never have turned scientist — if Lowell had stayed here in 1957 he'd never have invented so much as an electronic fly-trap, and no one would ever have heard of him. Surely you can see that this is the only way out, darling!" She looked at him hopefully.

A round summer moon had come up while they talked, silvering the balcony and the garden below with a mellow radiance proverbial for its persuading of young lovers. Lal Morin, resigned until now to the austere treadmill of Thirty-Third Century life with its metal city-hives and its frigid and angular women, found this setting and this woman inexpressibly desirable; but his Scientist's conditioning was thorough and his responsibility unmistakable. With the rare honesty of a man totally inexperienced in the art of deceiving himself, he fought his battle with temptation and emerged from the emotional carnage with a conscience battered but uncompromised.

"I can't take the chance, darling," he said. "More depends upon this than ever depended upon a decision before — it's not only our own futures that are involved, but the future of a world! If I should elect to remain

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here, and it developed that I had guessed wrongly in the face of mathematical —"

"Damn your mathematics," Myra said, stung by sudden suspicion. "Is that really your sense of duty speaking? Are you sure you wouldn't rather parse atoms in 3207 than be married to me here?"

"Never," said Lal Morin fervently. "Rather, if I could be certain that no catastrophe would follow, I would hurl Poundstone bodily into the translator. The fat troglodyte!"

Myra sighed. "Then we've nothing to worry about, you overprincipled martyr. Because you *must* have stayed here in 1957, as I've pointed out already, else all your histories would have been wrong. Something will happen to keep you here, no matter what you decide."

Lal Morin looked at the balcony doors and shuddered. "I'd better go now, darling. But — may I say goodbye to you here, rather than inside?"

Myra, as a matter of record, met him halfway. "It's going to be all right, silly," she said against his chest. And then, in a whisper of cold panic when she faced the cold finality of parting: "*Or is it?*"

Happily, it was.

On returning to the library they found that Vina Hagaio, operating on Myra's own brand of commonsense rather than on Lal Morin's mathematics of temporal extensions, had arrived at a solution of her own, and that Poundstone, seizing eagerly upon the opportunity to let someone else wash his current dirty linen and make his name famous into the bargain, had fled with her to 3207 to enjoy the future fruits of that labor.

"So you're stranded here, and I was right after all," Myra said in pardonable triumph. "You can't possibly create a paradox in time, don't you see, because anything you do in the past must have been done already or you couldn't have been there to do it in the first place."

"You're quite right, my dear," Lal Morin agreed, sounding perhaps a little fatuous about it all. "What is to be will be, since it already was."

He was not, once the wedding was over and he had had time to consider the situation more fully, particularly concerned with the contretemps so created.

It did not disconcert him in the slightest, for example, to discover that he was not only his own grandson some 50 generations removed, and that he was himself responsible for his own existence by virtue of having come back through time to marry his distant grandmother, but that neither as progenitor nor descendant was he in any way related to the original Poundstone. Other minor paradoxes, such as the necessity for his presently inventing an antigravity process which he would in later ages study assiduously

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in order that he might be able to invent it in the first place, he dismissed with a shrug, since the simple fact that he had done so made any puzzling over the process of its doing a ridiculous pastime.

He found himself actually indebted to Poundstone for having marooned him in time, and was so grateful that when he discovered some weeks later that Poundstone had fled to the future before composing his final — and most celebrated — poem of farewell, he sat down forthwith and penned it for him.

"For posterity must not be cheated of its literary inheritance," he said to Myra, "even though I must turn poet for the moment to maintain the recording in its proper alignment."

"To keep the record straight, you mean," Myra corrected.

"To keep the record straight, Madame Troglodyte. Listen to this and tell me if I have captured the true feel of the historic Poundstone meter:

"farewell you poor suckers
leaping like fleas
from reality
to a moiling time when people
labor frantically (like spastic
baboons wildly building
ships in bottles) to no
purpose. you're welcome to that
because by god I like it
here."

His wife laughed at his effort, but the critics of later ages proclaimed it a pinnacle of poetry, the veritable epitome of the style Poundstonian.

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Department of Urgent Invitation: Do not forget the Twelfth World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in San Francisco this coming Labor Day week end, from Friday, September 3, to Monday, September 6, F&SF authors already scheduled to attend include Poul Anderson, Isaac Asimov, Miriam Allen deFord, Gordon R. Dickson, Dave Dryfoos, Randall Garrett, Thelma D. Hamm, Willy Ley, Kris Neville and Wilson Tucker. Send $1 for your registration at once to Box 335, Station A, Richmond 2, California.

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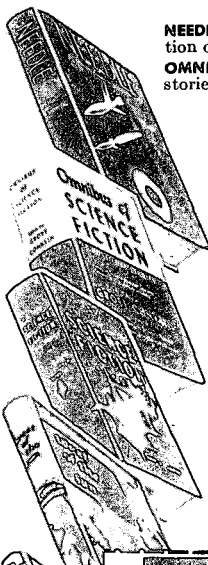

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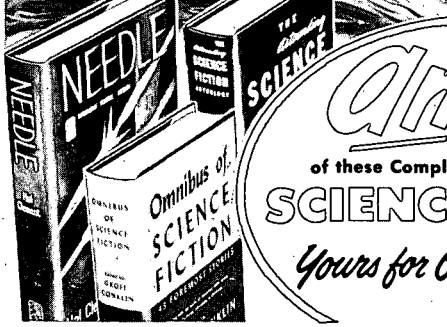

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